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OTHER WORLDS
SCIENCE STORIES

COLOSSUS III
By S. J. BYRNE

September 1950
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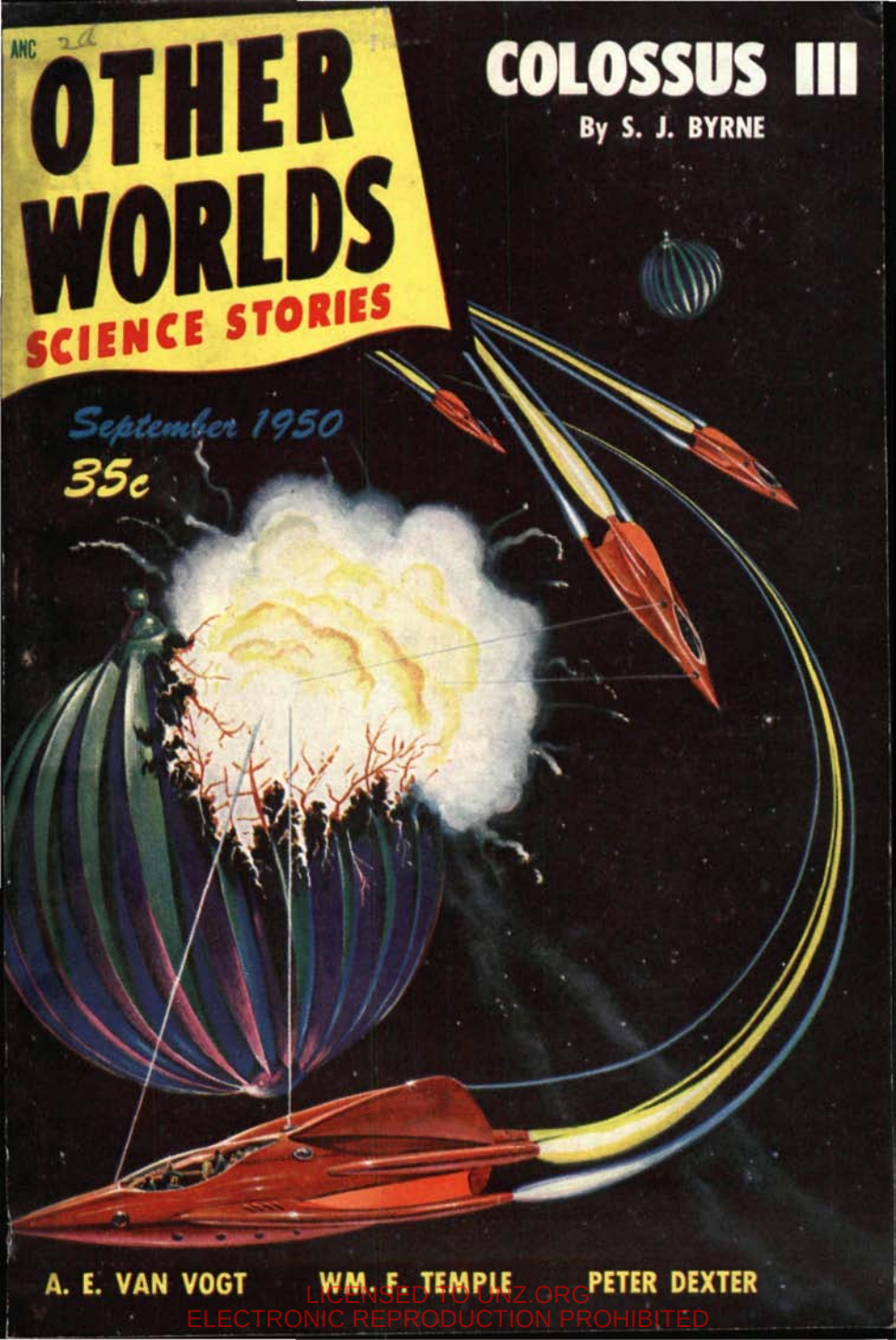

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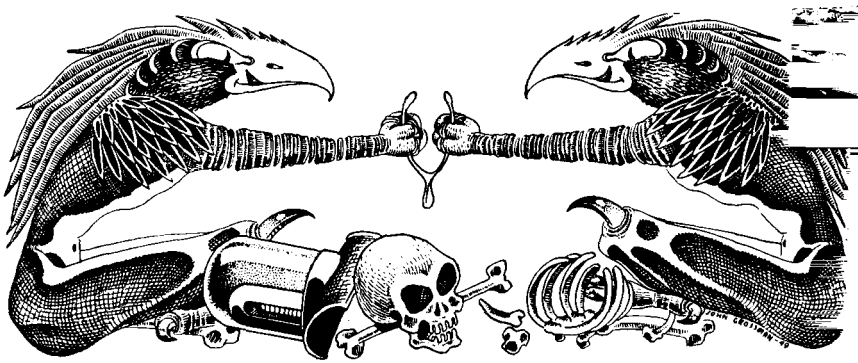

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EPTEMBER 1950 | ISSUE NUMBER 6 | VOLUME 2 NUMBER 2

EDITOR, Raymond A. Palmer
MANAGING EDITOR, Beatrice Mahaffey
ASSOCIATE EDITOR, Marge Sanders Budwig

OTHER WORLDS SCIENCE STORIES

October Issue on Sale August 8

STORIES

UTOMATON (4,500 words)..... A. E. van Vogt 6
ORGET-ME-NOT (8,500 words)..... William F. Temple 16
E SWORDSMEN OF VARNIS (900 words)..... Clive Jackson 38
TTLE MISS IGNORANCE (6,000 words)..... E. Everett Evans 40
E MUTE QUESTION (400 words)..... Forrest J. Ackerman 53
LACE OF DARKNESS (25,000 words)..... Peter Dexter 54
OLOSSUS III (25,000 words)..... S. J. Byrne 96
. GARFINKEL AND THE LEPRA-COHEN (7,500 words)..... Charles S. Tanner 142

FEATURES

ITORIAL 4
RSONALS 16
HER WORLDS BOOK SHOP..... 17
IT: THE GONDOLA..... 94
NEWS OF THE MONTH..... 95
BOOK REVIEW 140
LETTERS 156

Cover painting by Malcolm Smith

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EDITORIAL

YOU'LL pardon your editor if he takes a few lines to notify the science fiction world that he's the proud papa of a new baby son who checked in on February 28 at 8:51 P.M. If any of you astrologers want to make something of that, go right ahead. And now, down to other business. . . .

When we first ordered a cover painting from Hannes Bok, we asked him to surprise us. We suggested that we'd be happy to let him have his own head, and paint whatever he felt like painting, and we wouldn't handicap him a bit by trying to give him an idea, or tie him down by a specific assignment.

For weeks, we received letters telling us of the progress of the covers, which were designated only by the terms "the mauve one" and "the blue one." Said Hannes, "The mauve one is coming along fine, and I feel sure you will like it. However, I am not finishing the blue one, because it just isn't working out. And I don't want to even let you see a cover I'm not satisfied with." To which we replied, "Ship it to us, and let us judge for ourselves. Sometimes the artist is too close to his work."

Well, Hannes finished both covers and sent them to us, and fully expected to have the "blue one" returned to him.

The "blue one" is on the front cover of October IMAGINATION, our brand new sister magazine, soon on sale. We think it is even better than the "mauve one," which you'll get to see in the November OTHER WORLDS. We are sure that Hannes is a terrific artist, and equally sur that he is unable to judge his ow work properly—or maybe it's jus because he's so darn modest. A around, he's one swell guy, and we'r glad he's going to continue to wor for us on both covers and interior You'll see a lot of that boy!

Another special bit of news w want to pass on to you concernin cover artists is the fact that Jame B. Settles, who used to paint thos wonderful back covers for *Amazin Stories*, has done several covers fo us, and he'll be following Bok wit the cover for January, 1951. Settle is also doing a cover for our com panion magazine FATE, which yo might like to look at simply as a wor of art. It isn't science fiction, natural ly, being a painting of the Flyin Dutchman, but we feel that it is marine painting which rivals any o the work done by the famous Ses sions, who is the peer of marine art ists. Just as we are doing in OTHE WORLDS, we are doing in FATE— that is, inaugurating a new type o cover art which is predicated on th belief that good art is as essential t a cover as the subject matter. That is if a spaceship is to be depicted, i certainly won't harm the cover if i is also executed in an artful style with all the artistic genius of whic the artist is capable.

We think we've begun to demon strate that, first with our May cove which showed a BEM done with rea feeling; our July rocket ship whic was executed with a brilliance o artistic execution that positively mad it real; and the same for our presen cover. In all these covers, there is

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"feeling" present that cannot exactly be defined. There is a quality we call "atmosphere." There is "artistic expression" in the true sense of the word.

Another thing we have added to our covers is "emotion." In May you had sympathy, tenderness, love, and the feeling of human brotherhood, which we achieved with a bug-eyed-monster type cover. Malcolm Smith is to be commended for doing the "impossible." In July we expressed excitement and grandeur and pride. In this month's cover we expressed beauty, fury, and an air of potential motion. Next issue we will define terror and the grotesque, yet with an over lay of beauty which removes any stigma from the impression of terror.

OTHER WORLDS is now published every two months, but so many of our readers have asked us to step up publication that we are seriously considering putting the magazine out every six weeks, or nine times a year. Quite frankly, we are still not a Colossus in the publishing field, and these improvements take capital, and therefore, time. But we have a suggestion by which those of you who want more frequent appearance of OTHER WORLDS could make it a certainty within sixty days. All you'd have to do is subscribe! If only 2,000 of you would subscribe for either a 12-issue subscription at $3.00, or a 24-issue subscription at $6.00, we'd have the capital necessary! One out of every fifty readers! You'd even save money, since you'd get your magazines for 25c rather than 35c.

You readers have been dictating the policy of this magazine from the very beginning, and you've seen us do everything you suggested. We'd be utterly happy to follow your orders and bring the magazine out oftener, ultimately on a monthly basis, if you'd merely make a move that would *save* you money. How could you lose on a deal like that? But, no matter how you react to this, we are going to step up production the minute we get the capital, only, being just as much fan as you readers are, we get rather impatient to make the improvements we ourselves want.

The other day, talking to Artist Settles, we mentioned that one of the improvements we were planning was the presentation of back cover paintings, and we received an enthusiastic reaction from Mr. Settles. He was all for starting at once. He's beginning to work out a flock of ideas so he'll be ready when we give the word. How about you readers making some suggestions as to what you'd like to see on such a series of back cover paintings?

S. J. Byrne, whose trilogy "Colossus" comes to a conclusion in this issue, is on the island of Guam, working for Uncle Sam, and he writes that he has no time for writing these days, which is a shame because we know that he'd turn out something really fine if he could just get time off that construction job. Guam, he says, is becoming a little Paradise in the Pacific. Which is a heck of a lot better than it was nine years ago!

Our cover this month illustrates a scene from *Colossus III*, which winds up the trilogy on which Mr. Byrne exhausted nearly 80,000 words. When you consider that your editor *cut out* another 70,000 words, your amazement should be complete. Don't ever write that much on one idea again, Mr. Byrne. We doubt if we could go through another editing job of that kind.

Rap.

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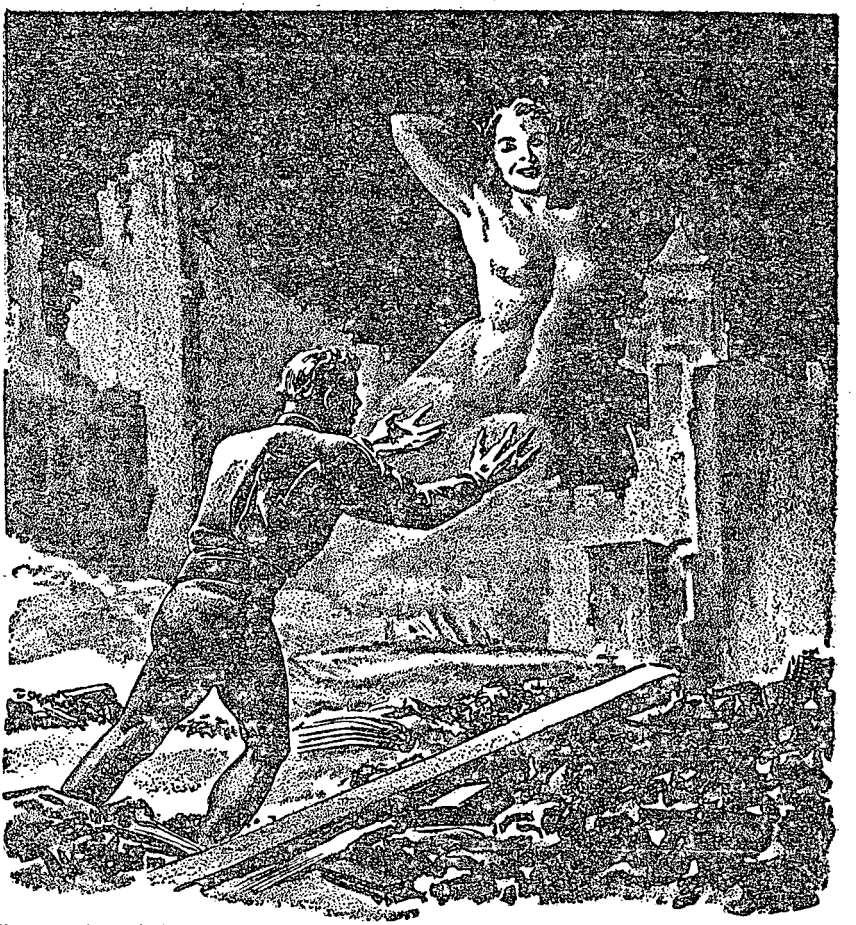

Illustration by Malcolm Smith

AUTOMATON

By A. E. VAN VOGT

The Tobors were automatons, obeying only the order to fight. They could be made human once more if you appealed to a basic human emotion.

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THE human automaton stirred uneasily in his small, almost invisible plane. His eyes strained into the visiplate, scanning the sky ahead. Out of the blue came two flashes of fire. Instantly, the plane careened as if struck from a double blow.

It fell slowly at first, then more rapidly, down into the enemy lines. As the Earth came near, a resisting mechanism went into operation. The rate of fall grew slower. The automaton had time to see that there was a vast ruin of a city below. Soundlessly, the tiny machine settled into the shelter of the crumbled base of what had once been a building.

A moment passed, then the radio beside him sibilated. Voices which were strange to him were talking to each other.

"Bill!" said the first voice.

"Shoot!"

"Did we get him?"

"Don't think so. Not permanently, anyway. I think he went down under at least partial control, though it's hard to tell with that safety device they have. My guess is he's down there somewhere with his motor shut off.

"I think we disabled him."

"Well, then, you know the routine when one of 'em is cornered just inside our lines. Do your psychology stuff. I'll call the *Vulture*."

"Don't pass the buck to me. I'm sick of spouting those lines. You give 'em!"

"All right. Shoot me the come-on!"

"Hmmmm . . . he's down there. Think we ought to go after him?"

"Naw! The automatons they send out this far are basically the clever ones. That means we couldn't capture him. He'd be just fast enough on the uptake to make it necessary for us to kill him, and who the devil wants to kill those poor, tortured slaves? — Did you get his picture?"

"Yep, he was listening with an intent look on his face. Fine looking chap . . . It's funny, and kind of terrible how all this started, isn't it?"

"Yeah. Wonder what this guy's number is."

There was a distinct pause. The automaton stirred uneasily. His number? Ninety-two, of course. What else? The voice was speaking again:

"Poor fellow probably doesn't remember that he once had a name."

The other voice said, "Who'd have thought when they first made a human duplicate—flesh and blood and bones and all—that today, only fifty years later, we'd be fighting for our lives against people who look exactly like us, except that they're natural eunuchs."

The automaton listened with vague attention, as the two men went on talking. Every little while he nodded as their words reminded him of something he had almost forgotten. The human duplicates had first been called robots. They had resented that name, and changed it around to make it Tobor, and that stuck. The Tobors proved to be very effective scientists, and at first no one noticed how rapid-

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ly they took over scientific posts in every part of the world. Nor was it immediately noticed that the Tobors were secretly carrying on a duplication campaign on a tremendous scale. The great shock to the human masses came when Tobor-infiltrated governments on each continent simultaneously enacted laws declaring duplication would henceforth be the only means of procreation. Sex was forbidden under penalty of a fine for the first offense, then imprisonment, and then, for recalcitrants, the Tobor-invented process of being made into an automaton.

A special police organization — which turned out to be already in existence—was set up to administer the new law. Tobor enforcement officers swung into action immediately, and there was some street fighting on that first day. Neither side even thought of compromise, so within two weeks full-scale war was raging.

The account ended, as Bill said: "I guess he's heard enough. Come on, let's go."

There was muffled laughter, then silence.

The automaton waited, disturbed. Sketchy memories were in his mind of a past when there had been no war, and, somewhere, there was a girl, and another world.

The unreal pictures faded. And again there was only this ship that clothed his body in almost form-fitting metal. There was the need to go on, aerial pictures to be taken . . . Must get up into the air!

He felt the ship tug in response to his urgent thought, but no movement followed. For seconds, he lay lethargically, then came a second urge for flight. Once more the tiny ship writhed with effort, but no upward movement resulted.

This time the automaton had the slow thought: "Something must have fallen across the ship, and is holding it down . . . Have to go out and remove it . . . "

He squirmed against the metal and padding that encased him. Sweat poured down his cheeks, but presently he stood free in ankle deep dust. As he had been trained to do on such occasions, he checked his equipment . . . weapons, tools, gas mask —

He flung himself flat on the ground as a great, dark ship swooped down out of the sky, and settled to the ground several hundred yards away. From his prone position, the automaton watched it, but there was no sign of movement now. Puzzled, the automaton climbed to his feet. He recalled that one of the men on the radio had said a *Vulture* had been called.

So they had been playing a trick on him, pretending to go away. Clearly visible on the ship's hull was the name: *Vulture 121.*

Its appearance seemed to suggest that an attack was to be made. His strong, determined mouth tightened. They'd soon learn it didn't pay to meddle with a Tobor slave.

Die for Tobor, mighty Tobor . . .

Tensely, the young woman watch-

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ed as her pilot lowered the high-speed plane toward the leveled ruin of the city where the *Vulture* lay. The big ship was unmistakable. It towered above the highest remnant of shattered wall. It was a black bulk against the gray-dark sameness of the rubble.

There was a bump and she was out of the machine, clutching her bag. Twice, her right ankle twisted cruelly as she raced over the uneven ground. Breathlessly, she ran up the narrow gangplank.

A steel door clicked open. As she hurried inside, she glanced behind her. The door clanged shut; and she realized gratefully that she was safe.

She stopped, as her eyes had to accustom themselves to the dim metal room. After a moment she saw a little group of men. One of them, a small individual with glasses and a thin face, stepped forward. He took the suitcase from her with one hand, and with the other, he grabbed her hand, and shook it warmly.

"Good girl!" he said. "That was well and swiftly run, Miss Harding. I'm sure no spying ship of the robots could have identified you in any way during the half-minute you were exposed. Oh, pardon me."

He smiled. "I shouldn't be calling them robots, should I? They've reversed all that, haven't they? Tobors is their name. It does have more rhythm and should be psychologically more satisfying to them. There now, you've caught you're breath." By the way, I'm Doctor Claremeyer."

"Doctor!" Juanita Harding managed to say, "are you sure it's *he?*"

"Definitely, your fiance, John Gregson, chemist extraordinary." . . . It was a younger man who spoke. He stepped forward and took the suitcase from the older man's fingers. "The patrol got the picture by the new process, whereby we tune in on their communicating plates. It was flashed to headquarters, and then transmitted to us."

He paused; and smiled engagingly. "My name is Madden. That's Phillips with the long, gloomy face. The big fellow with the uncombed hair, lurking there in the background like an elephant, is Rice, our field man. And you've already met Doctor Claremeyer."

Rice said gruffly, "We've got a hell of a job here, ma'am, begging your pardon for them rough words."

Miss Harding took off her hat with a brisk sweep of one hand. The shadows retreated from her face into her eyes, but there was a hint of a smile on her lips. "Mr. Rice, I live with a father whose nickname is 'Cyclone' Harding. To him, our everyday language is an enemy which he attacks with all available weapons. Does that answer your apology?"

The big man chuckled. "You win. But let's get down to business. Madden, you've got a brain that thinks in words, tell Miss Harding the situation!"

"Right!" The young man took up the refrain grimly. "We had the good fortune to be in the air near here when the first report came through that an automaton had been brought down alive. As soon as the identification arrived, we asked army head-

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quarters to set up a defense ring of all available planes. They stripped the entire nearby line to help us."

He paused, frowning. "It has had to be very carefully done, because we don't want to give the Tobors any idea of what's going on. Your fiance can't get away; that is certain, I think. And he can't be rescued unless they come out in force of a size that catches us momentarily off guard. Our big problem is to capture him alive."

"And that, of course—" It was Claremeyer, who cut in with a shrug of his shoulders—"may be easy or it may be difficult. Unfortunately, it must be fast. The Tobors will not be unaware long of this concentration of forces, then they will examine his file, analyze at least a part of the true situation, and act.

"The second unfortunate aspect is that in the past we have allowed ourselves a percentage of failures. You must realize that our tactics are almost entirely psychological, based upon fundamental human impulses."

Patiently, he explained the method.

"Ninety-two! . . . This is Sorn speaking."

The voice came sharp, insistent, commanding, from the automaton's wrist radio. The automaton stirred in his concrete shelter. "Yes, Master?"

Apparently, the contact was all that was desired, for he heard the other say, "He's still alive!" The voice was farther away this time, as if the humanoid had turned to speak to someone else.

A second voice spoke hesitantly, "Normally, I wouldn't have bothered, but this is the one that destroyed his file. Now, a *Vulture* crew is trying to save him."

"They do it every time."

"I know, I know." The second speaker sounded impatient with himself, as if he was aware that he might be acting foolishly. "Still, they've already given a lot of time to him, more than normal, it seems to me. And there is the fact that this particular ship engaged in a lengthy series of code messages with its headquarters. Afterwards, a woman arrived on the scene."

"They nearly always use women in these rescue operations." The Tobor's voice held a note of distaste, but his words were a dismissal of the other's argument.

This time there was silence for many seconds. Finally, the doubting one spoke again, "In my department, I have been acutely conscious that somewhere in our operations about two years ago we unexpectedly captured a human chemist who, it was stated, had discovered a process for sexualizing Tobors."

His emotional disgust was almost too much for him, and in spite of the frankness of his next words, his voice trembled. "Unfortunately, we learned of this too late for us to identify the individual involved. Apparently, he was put through a routine interview, and dementalized."

He had full control of himself again and went on sardonically. "Of

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course the whole thing could be just a propaganda story, designed to unnerve us. And yet, at the time, our Intelligence reported that an atmosphere of gloom and depression pervaded human headquarters. It appears that we raided a city, captured him in his home, wrecked his laboratory and burned his papers."

His tone implied that he was shrugging. "It was one of scores of similar raids, quite impossible to identify. Prisoners captured in such forays were in no way differentiated from those captured in other ways."

Once more, silence . . . then . . . "Shall I order him to kill himself?"

"Find out if he has a weapon?"

There was a pause. The voice came close, "Have you a blaster, Ninety-two?"

The human automaton, who had listened to the conversation with a faraway blankness in his eyes and mind, alerted as the question was directed at him through his wrist radio.

"I have hand weapons," he said dully.

Once more the interrogator turned away from the distant microphone. "Well?" he said.

"Direct action is too dangerous," said the second Tobor. "You know how they resist actual suicide. Sometimes it brings them right out of their automaton state. The will to live is too basic."

"Then we're right back where we started."

"No! Tell him specifically to defend himself to the death. That's on a different level. That's an appeal to his loyalty, to his indoctrinated hatred of our human enemies and to his patriotism to the Tobor cause."

Lying in the rubble, the automaton nodded as the Master's firm voice issued the commands. Naturally . . . to the death . . . of course.

On the radio, Sorn still sounded dissatisfied. "I think we should force the issue. I think we should concentrate projectors in the area, and see what happens."

"They've always accepted such challenges in the past."

"Up to a point only. I believe most earnestly that we should test their reaction. I feel that this man resisted too hard during his captivity and there's a tremendous pressure working on him."

"Human beings are very deceptive," said the other doubtfully. "Some of them are merely anxious to go home. It seems to be a powerful motivation."

His objection must have been rhetorical. After a bare moment of silence, he looked up and said decisively, "Very well, we'll attack!"

By an hour after dark, a hundred projectors were engaged on both sides. The night flashed with long trailers of bright flame.

"Phew!" Rice raced up the gangplank into the ship. His heavy face was scarlet with effort. As the door clanged shut behind him, he gasped, "Miss Harding, that fiance of yours is a dangerous man. He's trigger happy, and needs more propaganda."

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The girl was pale. She had watched Rice's attempt to get the screen into position from the great barrier window in the observation room. She said, "Maybe I should go out now!"

"And get burned!" Doctor Claremeyer came forward. He was blinking behind his glasses. "Now, don't you feel badly, Miss Harding. I know it seems incredible that the man who loves you has been so changed that he would kill you on sight—but you'll just have to accept the reality. The fact that the Tobors have decided to put up a fight for him hasn't helped matters any."

"Those beasts!" she said. It was a dry sob. "What are you going to do now?"

"More propaganda."

"You think he'll hear it over the roar of the projectors?" She was astonished.

"He knows what it is," said Doctor Claremeyer matter-of-factly. "The pattern has been established. Even a single word coming through will be a reminder of the whole pattern."

A few moments later, she was listening gloomily while the loud speakers blared their message:

". . . You are a human being. We are human beings. You were captured by the robots. We want to rescue you from the robots. These robots call themselves Tobors because it sounds better. They're robots. They're not human beings, but you are a human being. We are human beings, and we want to rescue you. Do everything that we ask you to do. Do nothing that they tell you to do. We want to make you well. We want to save you. . . ."

Abruptly, the ship moved. A moment later, the *Vulture* commander came over.

"I had to give the order to take off," he said. "We'll come back again about dawn. The Tobors must be losing equipment at a terrific rate. It's a bridgehead fight for them, but it's getting too hot for us also."

He must have felt the girl would place the worst construction on the withdrawal order. He explained to her in a low voice:

"We can depend on a slave using every precaution to stay alive. He'll have been given training for that. Besides, we did get the screen up and the picture will show over and over."

He went on, before she could speak, "Besides, we have been given permission to try direct contact with him."

"What does that mean?"

"We'll use a weak signal that won't carry more than a few hundred yards. That way they won't be able to tune in on what we're saying. Our hope is that he'll be sufficiently stimulated to tell us his secret formula."

Juanita Harding sat for a long time, frowning. Her comment, when it finally came, was extremely feminine. "I'm not sure," she said, "that I approve of the pictures you're showing on that screen."

The commander said judiciously, "We've got to strike at the basic drives of human beings."

He departed hastily.

John Gregson, who had been an

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automaton, became aware that he was clawing at a bright screen. As he grew more conscious of his actions, he slowed his frantic attempt to grasp at the elusive shapes that had lured him out of hiding. He stepped back.

All around him was intense darkness. As he backed away a little further, he stumbled over a twisted girder. He started to fall, but saved himself by grasping at the burned and rusted metal. It creaked a little from his weight and flakes of metal came away free in his hands.

He retreated anxiously into the darkness to take better advantage of the light reflections. For the first time he recognized that he was in one of the destroyed cities. He thought: "But how did I get here? What's happened to me?"

A voice from his wrist radio made him jump. "Sorn!" it said insistently. The icy tone stiffened Gregson. Deep in his mind a bell of recognition clanged its first warning. He was about to reply, when he realized that it was not he who had been addressed.

"Yes?" The answer was clear enough, but it seemed to come from a much greater distance.

"Where are you now?"

Sorn said slowly, "I landed about half a mile from the screen. It was a misjudgment, as I intended to come down much closer. Unfortunately, in landing I got my directions twisted. I can't see a thing."

"The screen they're using for the pictures is still up. I can see a reflection of it in Ninety-two's Wristo. Surely, it'll be a bright landmark."

"It must be in a hollow, or behind a pile of debris. I'm in pitch darkness. Contact Ninety-two and—"

The first reference to his *number* had started the train of associations. The second one brought such a flood of hideous memory that Gregson cringed. In a flashing kaleidoscope of pictures, he realized his situation and tried to recall the immediate sequence of events that had brought him back to control of himself. Somebody had called his name insistently . . . . not his number—his name. Each time they had asked him a question, something about a formula for — For what? He couldn't remember, something about—about— Abruptly, it came back!

Crouching there in the darkness, he closed his eyes in a sheer physical reaction. "I gave it them. I told them the formula. But who was — them?"

It could only have been some member of the crew of a *Vulture* ship, he told himself shakily. The Tobors didn't know his name. To them he was . . . Ninety-two.

That recollection brought him back with a start to his own predicament. He was just in time to hear the voice on the Wristo say vindictively:

"All right, I've got it. I'll be over there in ten minutes."

The Tobor in the distant Control Center was impersonal. "This is on your own head, Sorn. You seem to have an obsession about this case."

"They were broadcasting to him on a local wave," said Sorn in a

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dark voice, "so direct, so close that we couldn't catch what they were saying. And his answer, when he finally made it, was interfered with so that, again, we didn't hear it, but it was a formula of some kind. I'm counting on the possibility that he was not able to give them the full description. Since he's still at the screen, he hasn't been rescued, so if I can kill him now, within minutes—"

There was a click . . . the voice trailed off into silence. Gregson stood in the darkness beside the screen, and shudderingly considered his position.

Where was the *Vulture?* The sky was pitch dark, though there was an ever-so-faint light in the East, the first herald of the coming dawn. The sound of the projectors had become a mutter far away, no longer threatening. The great battle of the night was over.

. . . The battle of the individuals was about to begin. . . .

Gregson retreated even farther into the darkness, and fumbled over his body for hand weapons. There were none. "But that's ridiculous," he told himself shakily. "I had a blaster and—"

He stopped the thought. Once again, desperate now, he searched himself . . . Nothing. He guessed that in his mad scramble to get to the screen, he had lost his weapons.

He was still teetering indecisively when he heard a movement in the near night.

Vulture 121 landed gently in the intense darkness of the false dawn. Juanita Harding had taken off her clothes, and now had a robe wrapped around her. She did not hesitate when Rice beckoned. He grinned at her reassuringly.

"I'm taking along a cylinder of the stuff," he said, "just in case he doesn't become inspired quickly enough."

She smiled wanly, but said nothing. Doctor Claremeyer came to the door with them. He gave her hand a quick squeeze.

"Remember," he said, "this is war!"

She replied, "I know. And all's fair in love and war, isn't it?"

"Now, you're talking."

A moment later they were gone into the night.

Gregson was retreating in earnest and he felt a lot better. It was going to be hard for any one person to locate him in this vast maze of shattered concrete and marble and metal.

Moment by moment, however, the desolate horizon grew lighter. He saw the ship suddenly in the shadowy ruins to his right. Its shape was unmistakable. *Vulture!* Gregson raced toward it over the uneven ruins of what had once been a paved street.

Gasping with relief, he saw that the gangplank was down. As he raced up it, two men covered him with their blasters. Abruptly, one of them gasped, "It's Gregson!"

Weapons were scraped back into their leathery holsters. Hands grasped eagerly at his hands, and there was a pumping of arms. Eyes searched his face eagerly for signs of sanity, found them, and glowed with plea-

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sure. A thousand words attacked the dawn air.

"We got your formula."

"Great . . . wonderful."

"The genius made up some of the hormone gas in our own ship lab. How fast does it work?"

Gregson guessed that the "genius" was the tall, gloomy individual who had been introduced as Phillips. He said, "It takes only a few seconds. After all, you breathe it in and it's taken right into your bloodstream. It's pretty powerful stuff."

Madden said, "We had some idea of using it to intensify your own reactions. In fact, Rice took some—" He stopped. "But just a minute," he said, "Rice and Miss Harding are—" He stopped again.

It was the small man, Doctor Claremeyer, who took up the thread of Madden's thought. "Mr. Gregson," he said, "we saw a man on our infra-red plates heading for the screen. He was too far away to identify, so we took it for granted it was you. And so, Rice and Miss Harding went out and—"

The Commander cut him off at that point. "Quick, let's get out there! It may be a trap!"

Gregson scarcely heard that. He was already racing down the gangplank.

"Sorn!" The voice on the Wristo sounded impatient. "Sorn, what's happened to you?"

In the half-darkness near the screen, the men and the girl listened to the words of the Tobor on Gregson's Wristo. From their vantage point they watched Sorn looking at the pictures on the screen itself.

"Sorn, your last report was that you were near where Ninety-two was last known to be hiding—"

Rice put one plump hand over Gregson's Wristo, to block off the sound; and whispered, "That's when I let him have it. Boy, I never had a better idea than when I took along a cylinder of your gas, Gregson. I shot a dose of it at him from fifty feet, and he never even knew what hit him."

"—Sorn, I know you're still alive. I can hear you mumbling to yourself."

Rice said, "We'll have to be careful of our dosage in the future. He's practically ready to eat up the pictures. You can see for yourself—the Tobor-human war is as good as over."

Gregson watched silently as the one-time Tobor leader scrambled eagerly in front of the screen. A dozen girls were on parade beside a pool. Periodically, they would all dive into the water. There would be a flash of long, bare limbs, the glint of a tanned back, then they would all climb out. They did that over and over.

The trouble was, each time Sorn tried to grasp one of the images, his shadow fell across the screen and blotted her out. Frustrated, he rushed to another, only to have the same thing happen again.

"Sorn, answer me!"

This time the Tobor paused. The reply he made then must have

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shocked the entire Tobor headquarters, and the effect reached out to all the Tobor armies around the world.

Gregson tightened his arm appreciatively around Juanita's waist (she still wore her robe over the beauty with which she was to have lured him back to safety) as he listened to the fateful words.

"Women," Sorn was saying, "they're wonderful!"

THE END

ATTENTION: Anyone with information as to the present whereabouts of David A. MacInnes please notify Don Ford, 129 Maple, Sharonville, Ohio. MacInnes was last heard of in Sandy Springs, Maryland and is now believed to be in Canada, presumably Toronto . . . Burton R. Terrell, Pekin, Ind. would like to hear from anyone who has seen flying disks or believes that invisible beings walk the earth . . . Roger Nelson, 627 Robinson, San Diego, Calif. has a collection of stf and fantasy books which he is selling 3/$1 and has some magazines to sell or trade. He wants copies of books by Cummings, Wheatley, Kline, Stapledon and Merritt . . . Guy A. Gosselin, Gorham, N. Hamp. wants to correspond with amateur astronomers . . . Carl H. Geist, 2323 W. Ainslie St., Chicago 25, Ill. has for sale Unknown Worlds 1948 Anthology, AS March thru Sept. 1948, FA Oct. '44, Mar. '48, May thru Sept. '48 and the first 8 issues starting May, 1939 . . . Fans wishing to join The Science-Fantasy Society write to Calvin T. Beck, Box 877, Grand Central Station, New York 17, N. Y. If you live in or near Cleveland, O., ask Cal for information on the Cleveland chapter of the S.F.S. . . . The Universal Musketeers, an up-and-coming fan club announces that it has a free library for the use of members, as well as five fanzines which all members receive free. Interested fans should write Ronald Friedman, 1980 E. 8th St., Brooklyn 23, N. Y. If you live in the vicinity of Norfolk, Suffolk, Newport News, Richmond or Tidewater, Virginia get in touch with Jack Schwab, 58 Greene Blvd., Portsmouth, Va. . . . Wanted, by F. J. Ackerman, 236½ N. New Hampshire, Hollywood 4, Calif., Canadian WT '33-'38; Science & Invention, Aug. '23, Dec. '24; stills from The Sky Splitter, Just Imagine, Metropolis, Our Heavenly Bodies, By Rocket to the Moon, Mysterious Island, RUR, High Treason, First Men in the Moon; addresses of Slater LaMaster, Albert DePina, Cordwainer Smith, Ree Dragonette, Leslie Rubenstein, Evi Detring-Nathan, Andrew Lenard, Eleanor McGeary; issues of Orchideengarten, Thrill Book, Fantastica, Shuster & Siegel's Science Fiction, first 2 yrs. Buck Rogers Sunday strips; any gold or silver artwork by Paul; Science Fiction League lapel emblem; Science Fiction Ass'n. rocket tie; $1,000,000 to keep up with science-fiction . . . Will trade Weapon Makers, Outsider, Futuria Fantasia, Acolytes, Worm Ouroboros, Fantazius Mallare for—what rarities have you? The Case of the Baroque Baby Killer: Bradbury, 5c; The Mystery of the 33 Stolen Idiots: Keller, 50c Invasion from Mars text; Welles, 15c; Monsters of the Moon, Scientifilmemento, 25c; Fan Artists Portfolio, 75c; Bok Artfolio, $1.50. Contact Weaver Wright, Box 6151 Metro Station, Los Angeles 55, Calif. . . . Mrs. June Leeds Moore, 1112 Turk Street, San Francisco 15, Calif. would like pen pals who are interested in metaphysics . . . Tom Moulton, 15 Fordway Ave., Blackpool, Lancashire, England will exchange English fantasy books for back issues of Fate, Other Worlds, and other stf magazines . . . Wanted: Reports on Flying Saucers. Readers who have seen mysterious objects in the sky, and who can report accurate details, please send your report to Robert N. Webster, editor FATE, 1144 Ashland, Evanston, Illinois . . . This is your column; send in your personals for publication, on any subject. Exchange penpals—or heads. Anything goes.

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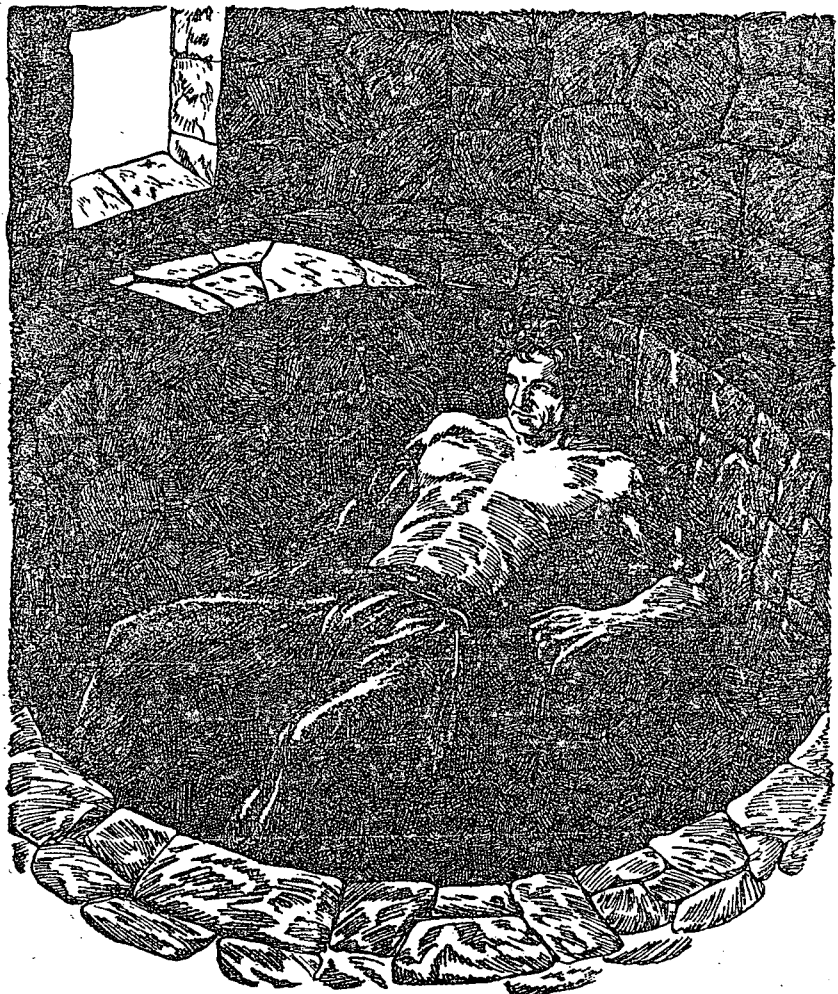

Illustration by Malcolm Smith

FORGET-ME-NOT

By WILLIAM F. TEMPLE

The world was very small; one could walk around it in a few hours and prove it was completely surrounded by a wall—beyond which was nothing.

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If a man could pass through Paradise in a dream, and have a flower presented to him as a pledge that his soul had really been there, and if he found that flower in his hand when he awoke—Aye! and what then?

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

SINCE the coming of light that day, nervous restlessness had increasingly possessed Direk. All of a sudden he jumped up with an exclamation of impatience.

"Where are you going?" queried Lock, the ancient, one-eyed philosopher.

"Round the world," said Direk, shortly.

"Again? Well, I shall still be here when you come back."

"I don't doubt it."

Direk walked away, stepping over the recumbent bodies of his sleeping and dozing fellow creatures. He circumvented the little groups of those who were up and busy with their social intercourse of gossip or were playing the eternal games of marbles, beetle racing, or wrestling.

The world was certainly round. The wall seemed straight as he looked along its length—or as far along it as he could see in the dim light—and it seemed straight as he walked along parallel to it. But Direk knew from experience that he had only to walk far enough and he would come upon Lock again, reclining there in his area by the wall, just as he had left him. Only, of course, he would come upon him from the other side.

There were too many people in the world. When walking, one was always bumping into them, jostling against them, or treading on them. There were no lonely places where a man might go and think, but so few of the people ever seemed to feel the need to think. For the most part, they were content to sleep and gossip, play and gamble, breed children, and fight viciously and purposefully for the largest possible share of the food which fell from the sky.

The sky! It was a dark mystery. Even in the daytime, all that could be made out were the circles of glowing golden light set regularly over the sky.

Those lights illuminated only the world below them, and showed nothing of what might be above. The spaces between them were but empty shadows, which merged into a common black obscurity as the eye sought to penetrate them. The flat, hard, grey cakes of food fell silently from those spaces, at irregular intervals, in varying quantities, in unexpected places, but they always fell.

It fell mostly in the day, but sometimes it fell in the night. Then the food hunt, the snatching and grabbing scramble in pitch blackness, was exciting.

Sometimes, one came upon a whole cake when crawling in the dark, intact. Then the trick was to drag it back to one's personal area, concealing the possession from the other seekers by adroit movement and a loud pretense of having been an unsuccessful seeker yourself.

Direk strode on.

Presently he came to the broad

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stream which ran swiftly in its deep, straight stone gully in a line right across the center of the world. Its source was in a metal grating in the wall one one side; its mouth was in a similar grating on the opposite side. The stream slaked the thirst of the people, bathed them, and carried away their waste matter. It was the gift of Dree.

Direk leaped easily across it, and in so doing he dropped into a little episode of pain among all of this human play. On the far side of the stream, a dozen or so people were gathered around one who lay on his back groaning and bleeding. A couple of women were bathing his wounds and the rest looked on.

A dark-visaged spectator whispered to Direk: "This has long been due to him. He stole his own children's food. It is right that Dree should punish him severely."

Direk nodded in agreement, and inspected the victim, who was a middleaged man. There were blue, swelling welts on his chest, and his left ear which was half torn off was still bleeding steadily.

Direk caught the muttering of another gossip, gleeful of his momentary capture of attention: "His hands are covered with burns, too!"

Direk went on thoughtfully. He was mentally surveying his past history, and wondering whether there was anything he had done that might merit such punishment, but he felt no sense of guilt.

He did not want to do anything that might bring upon him that swift horror that came in the night. Once he had slept right beside a man destined to be chastised by Dree. Some time during the night the man vanished mysteriously. Next morning he was found lying on the far side of the world with his tongue rooted out, so he was unable to tell of his experiences. Nobody ever was! The victim was always unconscious when found, and remembered nothing but having gone to sleep.

At length Direk came back to the stream, crossed it again, and soon saw Lock sitting just where he had left him. Only now the philosopher was attending to a still figure that lay beside him.

When Direk got nearer he saw that it was a feminine back that Lock was tenderly bathing, and the soft smooth skin of that back was torn and rent by long straight gashes, from which the blood welled slowly and persistently.

Direk stood over them. He felt slightly sick, and disgusted with he knew not what.

"Another sinner?" he said. "It seems that Dree was busy last night."

The female, whose face he could not see, gave a little sob. Lock did not look up, but frowned as he bent to his task.

"It's Sondra," he said quietly.

Sondra! In this one young girl was concentrated all that made life tolerable for Direk—beauty, grace, unselfish sympathy, and love. For a moment he grappled with sheer unbelief. Then with a choked exclamation he sank on his knees beside the girl, and gently turned her head that he might see her face. A poor, tear-

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wet face it was, with the eyelids puffed from crying.

"Why? *Why?*" he said, in a low angry growl.

"Never mind," said Lock sternly. "Go, change this water—bring fresh."

In a daze Direk took the hollowed stone, which served for carrying water from the stream, and refilled it. He had grown up with Sondra, and knew her to be incapable of any evil action or thought. She was a unique personification of unspoiled innocence. Even Lock, old and wise as he was, had his moments of selfishness and spite.

All the time he was getting the fresh water, this "Why?" hammered through his brain, and when he returned he again asked it aloud of Lock.

"It is not for us to question the ways of the Almighty," said Lock. "No one would know why but Sondra herself."

All Sondra could say, in a little moaning voice, was: "I don't know. I don't know."

"Then," said Direk, "Dree is evil, and if I could get my hands on Him I should strangle Him."

"That is childish nonsense," said Lock. "For one thing, Dree is a spirit, and you could no more strangle Him than you could strangle water. For another thing, He is a benevolent spirit, and all that He does is for our ultimate good, though it may not seem so if you take only the short view."

"What good came of your eye being knocked out?" demanded Direk.

"Your life—and Sondra's," said Lock. "For I learned not to keep all my food for myself. Until then, I did. I watched orphaned children starve, because they were not strong enough to fight, while I gorged myself. Then one night I lost my eye. That made me look into my heart and discover my evil. I went seeking abandoned children and found you and Sondra. Thus, through me, Dree saw to it that you did not starve to death."

"That came from the goodness of your own heart, and from nowhere outside it," said Direk.

"Still you are speaking without observation and without thought," answered Lock. "Now, look at this."

He reached out and plucked a mushroom from the little bed he had cultivated in one of the rare patches of thin soil.

"Did that come from me?" he demanded. "It is fine food, and Dree grows it, obviously for no other purpose than our pleasure and sustenance. Observe the stream—again it is plainly meant for our convenience. And what about the food that falls from above without our even asking? Yet for all this, man is still thoughtless and ungrateful."

"That's all chance, like the results of marble games," said Direk, surlily. "The conditions just happen to be so."

"If the nature of these be chance, then it follows that these punishments must also be accepted as chance, and it is reasonless to rile against them," said Lock neatly.

"Words only," growled Direk,

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making Sondra comfortable by pillowing her head on his shoulder. They had done all they could for her back now, and she lay with her eyes almost closed, clinging to her lover.

"Let us see," said Lock, gathering together a handful of broken pieces of rock. Then he threw them on the ground again. They scattered every which way.

"That is chance," said Lock, regarding them. "This is design."

He arranged the eight pieces in the form of a square within a square.

"Well?"

"You still observe nothing? Why, with my one eye I can see ten times as much as you who have two. Now look up at the lights in the sky."

Direk did so. He saw that they followed Lock's pattern.

"Design," commented Lock. "Therefore it follows that there must be a Designer. When you remember, in addition, that those lights regularly disappear that we may sleep and regularly come again that we may see to go about our business, then it is plain that the Designer is a benevolent one."

"Possibly," conceded Direk with reluctance, "but I think he is a poor one. I'm certain I could design better conditions for life than these."

"You are not satisfied with life?"

"No," said Direk shortly.

"Well, you'll leave it in time. We all do. That's part of the design."

"Yes, we leave it — dead — finished," said Direk, with bitterness, thinking of the appearance of the stiff unfeeling corpses before they vanished, as always, in the mysterious shadow of the night.

"Finished only with this life, here. Then we go to a world of light and beauty, where there is no more pain or hunger. A place to which I have given the name 'Heaven'."

"A place which exists in your dreams only," said Direk, gently stroking Sondra's hair. Her eyes were quite closed now, and she was beginning the deep-drawn breaths of sleep.

"You are wrong again. I have seen a wondrous picture of it, and if you would only use your eyes instead of going about grumbling, you could see it too."

"Where? How?" demanded Direk.

"I did not want to tell you about this until you were spiritually ready for it. You are still rather childish and impatient, but it seems that—unlike the others—you sometimes have thoughts above food. So perhaps this vision will give you peace, as it did me."

He paused, then went on: "You know the area of the Mullen family, that alcove in the wall, twice the width of a man, which seems to be topless—?"

"I know the thing," interrupted Direk. "Why, it runs right up into the sky!"

"It goes above the lights, certainly, but it does not reach the sky."

"How do you know?"

"I have been to the top."

"What?" Direk stared at the old man incredulously. "That doesn't make sense. The lights are immensely

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far above us. Why, they say that each of them alone is much bigger than the whole world, and they only look so small because they are so distant."

"They say," nodded Lock. "That means nothing. Actually, the lights are relatively small and quite near. I repeat, I have climbed higher than they. I have no witnesses, because food was falling at the time and that took the people's attention. Anyway, the light is not very bright in that area."

"And the picture is at the top?"

"Yes. There is a small slit from which a very bright light comes in a flat, narrow beam. It is the light of Heaven. It takes courage to face it, but if you nerve yourself to put your eyes to the hole, you can do it. You have to keep your eyes shut at first, and then open them only the smallest fraction and look between your lashes—you will conquer your pain, and see Heaven."

"But how do you climb? There is not a crack in which one might get a finger."

"Set your back against one side of the alcove and press your feet against the other side," said Lock. "Then you may work your way up by lifting your back and feet alternately, a little distance at a time. It is arduous and dangerous work. I myself made the journey only once. I was a young man, but even then I almost fell from exhaustion several times. I have not attempted it since, but I have not needed to. I have seen the "vision," and I shall never forget it. It is fast in my memory, and every night ere I sleep I see it glowing yet."

"If I would climb before dark, I must go soon," said Direk. He looked down at Sondra tenderly. She was fast asleep. The wounds on her back had ceased bleeding at last.

"I was afraid of your eagerness," said Lock, troubled. "Now if you go and fall, Sondra will die of anguish. I should have kept my silence longer. I ask you to wait, until Sondra is better, at least."

"I have waited in this dreary world long enough," returned Direk. "Here, old one, take my place as a pillow."

Gently he disengaged Sondra, without waking her, and passed her to Lock. When the old man was supporting her comfortably, Direk kissed her softly on the cheek and stood up.

"I shall be back," he said.

"And I shall still be here," said Lock.

"I don't doubt it," said Direk, again.

The Mullen children were playing in the alcove when he got there. If he attempted to clear them out, it would have meant an argument and possibly a fight with the Mullens, for they were a clannish, stupid, and aggressive family. There was a distant shout of "Food!" and everyone in the neighborhood dashed madly in the direction of the cry, so, like Lock, Direk made his ascent without an audience.

After an age of effort, he paused and thought he would have to give it up. He was high above the ground now, and the people below looked

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curiously small and fore-shortened. He was trembling, not only with muscular strain, but also with fear of this dimension with which he was quite unfamiliar — the height made him feel sick. His back had been skinned by the friction of his laboring climb, and blood and sweat dripped from him. Still he had not reached the level of the lights, but he was nearing it. Those mysterious, opalescent round shapes had become long thin ellipses from this viewpoint.

Another spurt . . . ?

He put his last bit of strength into it, mounted into shadow, and all at once became cognizant of the ledge of a recess at his side. He levered himself on to it, and sat and stretched his cramped leg and back muscles. The relief was enormous.

Presently he explored his new surroundings, groping his way into the recess. It became a narrow passage that burrowed and twisted its way into the wall. Negotiating a sharp curve, he came abruptly upon a thin but intensely bright beam of light, shoulder high, cutting across his path like a bar of some refulgent stone wedged by its ends between the opposing walls.

It was sometime before he could bring himself to apply his eyes, in the manner described by Lock, to the slit in the left-hand wall, which was the source of the light. Although he was squinting, with his eyes almost shut, the pain of its stabbing brightness was like sharp splinters being pressed into his pupils. But he persisted, bearing it, seeking the "vision."

Gradually, as if he had to teach his eyes to see (and, indeed, they had to be adjusted to receive the impressions of colors of a kind and intensity hitherto unencountered) he made out the form of the incredible picture.

There was a green, green land stretching far and wide, to a wall of brightest blue on which were set curving white shapes. In the foreground a sparkling stream ran—not dead straight, like the one he knew, but wound in a fascinating way. Beside it stood strange brown erections, that forked into a multitude of fingers which bent back and down and overhung the stream. These fingers seemed to hold hundreds of green patches, which every now and then swayed gently in concord. At the further border of the world—somewhere near the base of the blue wall, he judged—was a line of jagged and irregular objects, mostly grey and green and white-topped. He could make nothing of them.

For a long time he peered, reluctant to drag himself from this sight of wonderland, but the knowledge that night must soon come nagged him, as he could not make that descent in the dark.

He tore himself away, and stumbled uncertainly back along the passage, his eyes watering from the strain of resisting that overpowering light, the effect of it still blinding him. But the picture he had seen was in his mind's sight as clearly as if he were still looking at it.

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"I observe that you have seen Heaven," was Lock's dry comment on his return, "and are still seeing it," he added, regarding the young man's expression of half-dazed rapture.

Direk did not answer, but like a sleep-walker took the stone cup to get fresh water.

Sondra stirred in her sleep as he applied the cold liquid, and awoke. Seeing Direk bending over her, she put an arm round his neck and slowly drew his head down to kiss him on the lips. They murmured together awhile, and Lock made a fine show of being inattentive.

When Sondra had dozed off again, Direk said suddenly: "Lock, when was it you saw Heaven? How long ago?"

"Oh, it was in my youth . . . I was scarcely older than you are now."

"But it was after you had lost your eye?"

"Yes."

"H'm," said Direk, and reflected a moment. "And you think—"

"Food!" interrupted Lock urgently.

Direk glanced up and saw the square cakes falling, black against the lights. They were landing quite near.

"I'm not hungry," he said. "Now, look here—"

"Never mind about you," said Lock, rather harshly. "Sondra has not eaten all day. She will be hungry in the night. I could get a little, perhaps, but not enough. I am too old to fight well."

"I'm sorry," said Direk. "Here, take her from me."

The old man relieved him of the sleeping Sondra, and Direk leaped up and dived into the wild mass of people scrambling and struggling for the food. By the time he got there it had all been gathered up, but he saw a fellow staggering away with both arms supporting a pile of six or seven of the cakes. Direk snatched two off the top, and turned back.

The man snarled at his retreating back like a beast, put the remainder down and rushed after him. Direk was expecting it. He spun round and extended his free arm like a straight iron bar, standing with legs astride and braced. The man, unable to check his speed, ran his mouth full tilt into the bunched knuckles at the end of the strong, stiff arm. It snapped his head back, his feet went flying up and he landed on his back on the floor with a frightful jar. There he lay, nothing moving about him save the thick stream of blood from his burst mouth. And even before he had hit the ground, the pile of cakes he had left behind him had disappeared.

Direk returned with his prize.

"As I was saying," he said, squatting down, "you thought that was a picture you saw of Heaven?"

"Naturally it was a picture. You can't expect to see Heaven itself in this life."

"Nevertheless, you have seen it," said Direk, slowly. "It looked flat, like a picture, to you, because you have only one eye. You can't detect perspective, but I had two eyes, and I saw."

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Lock looked at him with his mouth open.

"Another thing," pursued Direk. "Did you not perceive things *moving?*"

Lock shook his head dumbly.

"Well, I did, so don't tell me I don't observe things."

"I—I thought perhaps the water in the stream seemed to move," stammered Lock, "but the sight of my eye isn't very good. I couldn't rely on it. I thought it a trick of the light." He recovered some part of his poise. "All the same," he pronounced, "even if it did appear to move, it may still be only a picture, marvellously constructed by Dree to give us some inkling of our destination."

"It isn't a picture: it has depth and distance . . . So you think you're going to walk in that green land after you're dead?"

"I do."

"If you could somehow make that slit larger, I believe you could walk there now," said Direk deliberately.

"If I did not judge what you say to be only a mad dream of youth, I should call it blasphemy," said Lock sadly.

Direk felt a little surge of annoyance.

"Look, old fellow, you're wise and aged, and you see much that I miss, but your mind is as narrow as my finger. Have you never thought upon the nature of the 'Not-Here'?"

"This world is all there is, my son. The wall is the edge of a substance which stretches to infinity. This hole in it was hollowed out by the hand of Dree that we may have space in which to live and move."

"You exasperate me, Lock. You are bound in 'Here' by the circle of your own closed mind, even more than by the circle of the wall. Honestly, I believe you *like* it here!"

"We must be here for a purpose, and I am content to let that purpose remain Dree's business."

As Lock spoke, the golden lights above dimmed and quickly went out. Night had come. "Goodnight," added the old man, settling himself to sleep and trying not to disturb Sondra, who was still half reclining upon him.

"Good-night," responded Direk, not very graciously. He could not sleep for a long while.

It must have been near dawn when he awoke with a wild sense of falling. Indeed, he was falling, for he had gone to sleep sitting with his back to the wall, and suddenly that support had been removed. He found himself lying stretched out in a daze, with his head singing from the collision with the floor.

The floor? Did it, then, somehow extend into the wall? He maneuvered himself onto his hands and knees, and felt about in the darkness. It became apparent that the wall had opened immediately at his back in the shape of a rectangular hole, and through it lay a mounting series of hard levels. It was his first experience of a staircase. A great excitement seized him. There was a way out of "Here!" This staircase itself

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lay in the "Not-Here!"

In a fever of exploration he began to climb it, clumsily, feeling the way ahead of him. Up and up, seemingly endless, it went. . .-.

At last he perceived light above him, not the dim golden glow he was accustomed to, but a strange and strong pearly light. Presently he found it emanated from another rectangular opening. He crawled up to it and peered through, shading his eyes.

He looked out on the world he had seen through the slit, but it was not bathed in dazzling light as he had seen it then. Instead, there was a misty sort of gray light, which he found he could bear without squinting.

The green land looked quite shadowy, a sort of dark gray-green. The distant wall, which had been an intense blue, was a dirty white, with grey blurs on it, and it towered up so high that he could not see any top to it: it seemed to curve towards and above him, until it was cut by the straight upper edge of the hole.

He stepped out through the frame into this strange world, peering up, seeking to see that top—and recoiled with a little gasp. He had trodden on something soft. In his world there was nothing soft save human flesh. —And so he discovered loamy earth and thick grass.

He braced himself to move forward into a land of wonders . . .

A little later, he sat on the bank of the stream in a state of trembling ecstasy trying to take stock of all the staggering discoveries he had made. He had to piece them together and deduce what he could from that wonderful mosaic.

First, what Lock and all the others thought was the whole world was but a small cavern beneath the great cylindrical tower which reached up towards the roof of the far greater outer world. He could not guess how far above him this roof was, but it and the circular wall about were joined imperceptibly in one huge curving expanse. He had walked all around the tower but found no aperture in it other than the one he had come from.

Second, this outer world was made of a far greater range of materials than his, which was almost wholly stone. He had examined the trees by the brook, and made nothing of them. There seemed to be no purpose to them, but in the distance there were other similar objects, both singly and in groups. They were all, somehow, very pleasing to look at. He had investigated plants and bushes, seeds, berries, and flowers.

The flowers engrossed his attention most of all. Their delicacy, coloring, sweet scents, and fragile loveliness combined to shape his opinion that they were the greatest treasures in this world. He had come upon a clump of very small ones of a shade of blue so rich that it thrilled him to look at it. He could not bring himself to leave them, so, greatly daring, he had plucked one of them, and now carried it with infinite gentleness in his palm.

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Again, there were new kinds of life. He could see silvery things darting about in the clear waters of the stream. He had already marvelled at the flying birds and their coloring, and once or twice he had seen a little brown and white thing running swiftly in the distance with a queer hopping motion.

And the air—it was like a drink of water after a long thirst—fresh, cool, invigorating. It made him feel so much more *alive* than he had ever felt.

The sky-wall had perceptibly brightened. It was becoming difficult to look at squarely. The smudges upon it in one direction had become creamy-white shapes. In the opposite direction they were still darkly grey, but somehow marvellously lit from beneath so that they had edges of undreamed-of brilliance. The whole wall over that way was becoming stained with a red brighter than blood, and growing brighter still.

He had the feeling that this world was waiting in awe for the coming of something of infinite majesty. He waited, too, cowering a little on his bank in uneasy anticipation of the unknown.

A few long moments later, there came a great light moving up the red-stained side of the sky-wall. He beheld an overpowering vision of a disc of pulsing red-white light in the center of a crowd of flags and banners of living color, for such had those grey smudges become. Then he dropped his head, and shielded his blinded, aching eyes. He could not look at it directly again.

But he had seen the sun.

When he dared to raise his head at last, the world had been transformed into the landscape he had seen from the slit—A verdant carpet stretching away to the brightest blue. The smudges were now everywhere curving white shapes, and they had changed their positions. As he watched, they were still changing, infinitely slow.

The mist was gone, and at the distant border of the green land there stood, clear to view now, the line of jagged and irregular objects, grey-green and white-topped. They spurred his curiosity. He decided to walk to them and investigate their nature.

He had to walk with lowered head and half-shut eyes: the brightness of everything about him hurt him like fire.

Some hours later he was forced to rest. He had walked a distance equivalent to many times round his own world, and his legs cried out for respite. So he sat under a tree, seeking in its slight shade some relief from the incandescent light which had in some mysterious way moved up the wall until it was somewhere above his head.

The great tower was far behind him now—looking no taller than a man seen at five paces, but the objects ahead of him along the skyline seemed only slightly larger. They must still be an immense distance away.

He concluded that they were great

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risings of the land, reaching far upward, higher than the tower. Even so, they were low and small against the immense arc of the blue wall, which therefore must lay an unthinkable distance beyond them.

Upon the side of one of those rises was a tiny group of white marks. It was at the very limit of his vision—his eyes watered as he tried to make out the form of it—but he could swear that the marks were regular. It was inexplicable, but he felt drawn towards those marks.

Just then, something landed with a plomp at his feet. It was a shining ball. It had, apparently, dropped from the sky. Was this the food, then, of this strange land? He nibbled at it cautiously. It was succulent—and delicious! The food of the gods, indeed. For the first time it occurred to him that eating could be a pleasure in itself, and not merely an antidote to hunger.

The ball was soon gone, and then he noticed others hanging from the tree-branches above him. He did not think of trying to reach them. No doubt they dropped from time to time as Dree saw fit to release them for food.

Wouldn't Sondra enjoy one of those!

With a little pang of dismay, he realized that he had given no-one but himself a thought in this long rapture of exploration. He was being utterly selfish. He had discovered a way into a wonderful new world, and had rushed greedily into it, leaving Sondra and Lock and all the others shut up in their gloomy cave.

He must go back and set them all free.

But—the mystery of those distant land-risings and the marks? He gazed at them ardently again, and felt a quick pain in his heart and a strange yearning. Again that sense of being drawn towards the distances.

There was an inner battle, but the issue was clear. The goal of his desire was evidently too far to reach this day. Sondra would be worrying about his long absence—no doubt was already worrying—apart from which, she and Lock would be needing food again. They were not strong enough to get it themselves. Love brought duty as its companion. Sondra's back needed further attention, too. . . . He wished he were two people: one who could go on happily exploring, and one who could go back and fulfill what conscience expected of him.

But Sondra and Lock were bound up with him. He must go back. . . .

On that reluctant journey, the white curved things on the sky moved up over his head and became grey again, and then from above came pouring water in a heavy shower of drops all over the land. It was cold and fresh, and soon he was streaming wet as if he had bathed in the stream. He had been hot and dusty from travel. Dree had seen his need again, and sent this refreshing bath.

In the midst of it there came without warning a terrific flash of light that sent him, blinded and in awful fear, grovelling face-downwards in the wet grass, while a mighty rumbling

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passed along the sky above him. He judged that he had been given a glimpse of the presence of Dree Himself. . . .

When at last he reached the opening in the tower, he had seen the glory of a sunset, and the world was fading into darkness. He entered the aperture and set foot on the stairs, and then was compelled to take a last look back at Heaven.

The sky was as black now as the sky of his own world, but its mystery was even greater. For truly scattered over it were thousands of tiny twinkling lights that he had not perceived there in the day. He saw the veiny silhouette of a tree against them, and the beauty of it suddenly caught him by the throat.

Some wild voice within him urged him not to forsake that world, not even for a moment, but against that was the gnawing sense of the long separation from Sondra. He was aware of a growing ache to see her again. With sudden resolve he turned his back on Heaven and began to feel his way down the dark staircase. He would find Sondra and bring her out to see this wondrous night.

They would have this one night together under the twinkling lights, just the two of them with all that wide world to themselves.

Tomorrow they would let everyone else come.

He reached the bottom of the stairs and found himself on a level stretch of stone which he did not recall. He walked gingerly across it, his arms extended forward and feeling with his fingers, he encountered a wall barring his way. At that moment of surprise, a queer sensation that he was growing heavier came over him. His feet were pressing against the floor, his knees giving. Then the sensation ceased suddenly, with a strange sickening little upheaval in the stomach.

As he stood, bewildered, the wall rolled aside with a rumble, and he found himself staring into a queer-shaped little world flooded with golden light.

"Come forward," commanded a deep slow voice.

He advanced, blinking, adjusting his eyes to the light.

"Stop," said the voice, and now he could see that it came from someone seated on a raised platform before him. He had not seen a throne before, but there was one, and its occupant was an old but huge and powerful man with a luxuriant white beard. He looked benevolent, if not formidable, and his white-lashed blue eyes twinkled as he gazed down at Direk.

"So you came back, Direk," he said.

"Who are you? How do you know my name?" asked Direk uncertainly and in some awe.

"I am Dree. I know everything."

"You are Dree of the world outside?"

"There is no Dree of the world outside. I am Dree of this world."

He pointed an enormous wrinkled fore-finger at a large screen which was set upon one wall. On it Direk saw a downward view of a part of

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his old world, showing a portion of the straight stream which ran in its gully across the center. It was a living picture, taken apparently from a place high up on the curved wall. Although most of the people lay stretched on the floor in slumber, some still moved around, and the flowing water of the stream could be seen distinctly.

Direk did not think to inquire how such a picture could be: it was one of Dree's miracles, to be accepted as such. One thing, however, caused him to wonder.

"But—isn't it night there now?" he asked. "How can we see them?"

"The lights do not really go out at night: they change their emission frequency to the infra-red band. Unlike the human eye, the television camera is sensitive to infra-red rays. Oh yes, I watch my people night and day. The good shepherd, as one might say."

Hardly a word of this meant anything to Direk.

"From 843 different angles," added Dree. "Now look at this—Angle 547."

There was a row of dials and pointers along the inner side of one arm of the throne. Dree turned his attention to it and began manipulating things.

While he was so engaged, Direk darted swift glances at his surroundings. All one wall was a window, and through it could be seen the black sky of the outer world, with its thousands of points of light. The landscape beneath was the faintest possible outline: scarcely more than a slight difference of shade.

Directed through the window to some point out on that landscape was a long cylinder, on a tripod, a good many paces from Direk. At the near end of it was a small square screen. It was an instrument for magnifying distant things, Direk guessed. He gave a glance at the image on the screen. With a thrill of recognition, he saw the pattern of white marks he had been striving to reach. They seemed to be things like white boxes with regularly spaced lights on their sides, and around their bases he was sure he could see tiny moving things. He yearned to go over and examine the image close at hand.

But at that moment Dree said: "Behold!"

Direk turned to see that on the other and larger screen had appeared a close up view of Sondra and Lock lying side by side. They were both awake. Lock looked worried, and Sondra tearfully distressed.

Direk started as their voices came from the screen.

"He'll never come back," sobbed Sondra. "No one has ever been away as long as this."

Her accents went right to Direk's heart. He felt sick with shame.

"Try to sleep now, Sondra," said Lock, soothingly. "We'll have another look around in the morning."

"They've been walking about looking for you all day," said Dree, with what seemed to be an air of satisfaction. He put a finger on a switch. The screen went dark and silent. "Microphones everywhere," he added

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inconsequently.

"I must get back to her," exclaimed Direk. Please let me go now, Dree."

"Presently, presently," murmured Dree. "So you didn't think much of the outer world, eh?"

Direk stared. "It was marvelous beyond belief," he said slowly.

"Then why did you come back?"

"To fetch Sondra, of course, and all the others."

"As I thought," said Dree. "You want your woman. You want company. You're not big enough to stand out there alone—as I stand alone. That's the difference between Dree and a man."

"But"—began Direk, astonished and dubious, "I love Sondra."

"The word 'love,' as you use it, is merely a covering for a multitude of personal needs and desires," said Dree. He did not look benevolent now: his blue eyes were hard. "You desire Sondra physically, you desire her reassurance of your own existence, you desire her praise and admiration and service. That's all. Only Dree is entirely unselfish. I bestow all my attention on you people, tirelessly, unceasingly, while you sleep and play and fight. I give you strength and purpose in life—you develop your muscles and will and alertness in the struggle for the sustenance I drop calculatingly among you, so that you will not be bored or listless. I give you your days and nights, your food and drink and shelter, chastise and correct you when necessary, and watch over you always—for you are all my children."

"You . . . chastise us?" repeated Direk, haltingly.

Dree picked up a heavy whip and weighed it in his right hand. His eyes were gleaming strangely.

"Certainly I do," he said softly. "You must be taught right from wrong."

"Why did you beat Sondra?" burst out Direk. "She has never done anything wrong!"

"I can't always make personal distinctions," said Dree, throwing the whip down carelessly. "Sometimes I do, as in the case of that philosopher friend of yours, Lock, for instance. His eyes saw too much for his own good. He was always peeping and prying into things, a habit that had to be corrected in time. Usually I just pick on anyone as a representative for the general sins. The one suffers for the many. It's the example that counts, you see. The others learn to behave themselves just as much as the one who is chastised."

A vision of Sondra's torn back rose before Direk's eyes. A burning anger gripped him, however, he restrained himself and spoke carefully.

"Supposing the victim is really quite innocent?"

"Nobody is quite innocent, except for me," said Dree. "Punish anyone at random, and he himself will begin to seek and find reasons for his own punishment. For, like all of you, his heart is full of guilt, and he realizes he can blame no one but himself. Just as you feel guilty for leaving your kind."

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"*You* opened the way for me to do that," Direk pointed out.

"Correct. The wall of your world is full of concealed doors, passages, elevators, all controllable from here. There are a hundred ways in. That is how I take my victims in the night. First I make sure everyone in the vicinity is asleep, of course. My chosen ones soon wake up when they feel my lash and tongs and burning brands! How they squirm!" His eyes were glowing now, and his tongue licked his lips. Direk was appalled.

"After their punishment, I obliterate the memory of it by hypnosis," Dree went on with something like a chuckle. "I don't want them comparing their stories and getting to know too much about me. The fear of the unknown is a most powerful deterrent."

Direk felt that Dree was shrinking rapidly in his view, while he himself was becoming larger and of more importance.

He said: "Then why let me know so much? Why let me discover that outer world?"

Dree smiled a twisted smile.

"You were only the guinea-pig in an experiment. You were just a sample I took out in a test-tube and held up to the light to see how my people were shaping. You reacted just as I thought you would. You were not strong enough for the outside world and had to fly back to the shelter of *my* world. For there is no Dree out there, and no one to look after you. I thought perhaps some of you might develop aspirations and am always watching for the first signs of that. That is why I left a peep-hole for the stronger ones to find. Oh yes, I watched your climb, and heard what you had to say about it. Very perceptive, your theory of the 'Not-Here,' but brain without character is useless. You are the strongest of the people down there, but you still can't do without me, you see. You had to come crawling back."

Direk kept his thoughts on that to himself.

"And what now?" he asked.

"I shall chastise you, and put you back where you belong—among the other worms called 'men'."

"Are you not afraid that I shall tell of what I have seen?"

"I am Dree. I am not afraid of anything. From your kind down there it is plain that there is nothing to fear nor ever will be. Worms! I know them too well, much better than you do, for I have studied them for generations. Tell them all you like, and see where it will get you!"

"I shall!" declared Direk, and took a purposeful pace towards the platform. That was as far as he got. Dree touched a button; a sort of ripple seemed to pass from the throne and through the air, and then an invisible force held Direk firmly in his tracks.

"You *dare* to think of attacking me!" said Dree in a low grating voice, as though he were straining to suppress white-hot fury.

He descended from the throne, deliberately, trailing his lash, and ad-

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vanced with his eyes almost bolting from his head. Tiny bubbles of foam were clinging to the hairs at the corners of his lips . . .

Sondra and Lock found Direk the next morning quite near their area. He was unconscious. Never before had a man been flogged so fearfully by Dree. There was scarcely a square inch of his skin untouched.

For two days he was in delirium. Sondra, despite her own condition, nursed him constantly. Lock fought like a fiend to get them all food.

When at last he came to his senses, and told them the whole story, they thought he was still delirious.

"But I tell you, Lock, I know what I am saying!" he said, with force.

"Yes, of course," said Lock, soothingly—and maddeningly.

"I can't help wondering about Dree," said Direk, presently. "It is certain that he is a sadist, and mentally and morally unbalanced. There are dark and tortuous corridors in his mind. He is living in a world of myth. I believe that deep within himself he is tortured by some awful sense of inferiority, which he won't admit, and this lordship over us is an attempt to justify himself to himself. I wonder how he originally got this hold over us?"

He pondered a while.

"Now, those white markings on the far away slopes. From what I saw, I judge them to be the dwelling places of other men—some superior kind of men. They were huge and wonderful places, lighted under the night sky. I'm sure that's where the people of Heaven live, Lock. Perhaps he lived there once, and was cast out for some sin against the community. Thus he came to live in this solitary tower, quite alone, brooding over being spurned by his fellows. A mind like that would seek revenge, of course . . ."

He mused further.

"Suppose he stole the infant children of his judges, brought them here before they could even talk or have any clear idea of their environment, and kept them in this place? A race would grow up under his domination, thinking of him as Dree and knowing of no other place than Here. Thus, in his twisted view, he would turn the tables and become judge of the species who had judged him. But some of us may have inherited the dim childish memories of our ancestors, and so feel intuitively that there is a place other than Here, as I did."

"You don't know what you're saying," muttered Lock, glancing around almost apprehensively, as though he expected the wrath of Dree to strike them then and there.

"But you think Dree may know what I'm saying?" asked Direk, with a quizzical smile. "I have little doubt that he's listening and watching at this moment. Dree won't asault me again—Not yet, anyway. To do so would be to admit that he fears me, and he won't admit that to himself. He has a fierce pride, so will choose to ignore me. He's rather pathetic, in a way, but I think underneath it

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all, he has a burning desire to be loved and wanted, but doesn't know the right way to go about it. Dree was quite incapable of understanding what brought me back voluntarily to Here. Sometimes he deludes himself that we all do love and need him. Your sort of talk, Lock, about suffering being necessary to make us appreciate what we get, must be music in his ears—and strengthening to his attitude."

"This is all—remarkable fantasy. Remarkable fantasy," muttered Lock, half to himself.

Direk suddenly felt dejected. All the eager spirit of his exposition ebbed from him. How did he know that this grand erection of supposition and guesses, based on the memories of his experiences, was not, after all, more than "remarkable fantasy"? He did not, and could not know. Even those memories—might they not be only further illusions — dream-stuff thought up by his anguished mind during his period of delirium?

He turned over with a groan, and would say no more. Was it his imagination that sensed Dree laughing at him?

It was later that same day, as he lay there brooding, that his gaze fell upon a little brown wisp of a thing lying among Lock's mushrooms. He picked it up, wonderingly. There was something oddly familiar about the shape of it.

"What is this?" he besought Lock.

"That? It was a little plant-like thing we discovered clenched in your hand when we found you. I planted it in my patch of soil, but it withered and died. I don't think it had a proper root."

Strength flowed triumphantly back into Direk.

"This was the little, lovely flower of marvelous blue that I plucked and carried with me in Heaven—just as I told you in my story. You see, it *was* true!"

"It is true that you went to Heaven, as others have been, for you were flogged by Dree, and He dwells there. But you cannot really remember how you came by that flower, for not one of us remembers the actual experience of our punishment in Heaven."

"No, Lock, that will not do. I *know* now. Call the people around. I would tell them of Heaven, and give them hope that it can be attained in our life-time."

Shaking his head doubtfully, Lock obeyed. Presently Direk, with Sondra by his side, described his journey in the outer world to a curious and wondering crowd. When he had finished, he waited for their comments.

"A place where you have to walk about with half-shut eyes or be blinded? That wouldn't suit me," said one.

"Only one little piece of food all day? Not enough," said another.

"Water pouring all over you from the sky? Most uncomfortable," said another.

"You walked half the day and never reached the wall? We'd lose our friends, our children, and our-

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selves in a place as big as that," said another.

"Queer beasts running and *flying* about? They might kill you as you slept," said another.

"It must have been wrong to go there—look how severely you were punished," said another.

They made these remarks with only a mock seriousness.

"Is there not one man among you who really believes there is such a place as I have described?" demanded Direk.

No one spoke. There was a titter.

Direk remembered Dree's words: *"From your own kind down there it is plain that there is nothing to fear nor ever will be . . . Tell them all you like, and see where it will get you!"*

No doubt Dree was watching this meeting with ironic amusement at Direk's discomfiture.

Direk fought down his despair.

"Any of you men has only to climb up that recess in the Mullen's area to see it for himself," he said.

"And how do you climb it?" asked one.

Direk explained.

"A mad thing to do at the behest of a visionary," answered the man. "Who wants to break his neck for a dreamer?"

There were murmurs of approving laughter.

"No volunteers, you see," said the man turning away.

For a moment, the bitter despair of this further disappointment got on top of Direk. "What *is* the use?" he thought to himself. "Worms! He was right in that. He has nothing to fear from them."

Then determination not to be beaten surged up again, indestructible. Tight-lipped and white, he rose unsteadily to his feet. The movement burst open some of his scarce-closed wounds.

"Darling! What are you doing? You mustn't stand!" whispered Sondra in tense anxiety, and Lock tried gently to force him down again.

"Follow me, all of you," said Direk, staggering forward and throwing off the restraining hands of Sondra and Lock.

He led them, with uncertain steps, to the Mullen's area.

"There is one volunteer," he said, grimly, and prepared himself to climb. That silenced the crowd.

Lock said "No!" urgently, and stepped towards Direk. "You are too weak. Let me show them how. I have done it once—I can do it again."

"Not at your time of life, old one," said Direk. "Look after Sondra. That's your task. As for me, you have no idea of the strength that moves me now!"

He began to climb, while the crowd watched, and Sondra hid her face on Lock's shoulder. He climbed very slowly and painfully, but even so, he soon tore open all the wounds on his back. Still he persevered, and at long last passed up into the shadow.

When he disappeared from view, the crowd lost much of its interest. Some began to drift away, while others collected in little groups and started playing gambling games. One

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of the groups was spattered with drops of blood falling from the unseen and straining climber above. They swore, and moved their position.

At length, Direk could be seen descending. Sondra and Lock watched breathlessly every inch of his downward progress. From his dazed expression, he was plainly at the limit of his physical endurance, and only blind will kept him moving mechanically.

When he was almost down, Dree produced one of his masterstrokes of irony.

Food began to fall in quantity some little way off. With a whoop, the whole remaining audience, except Sondra and Lock, rushed away to scramble and grab and fight. And Direk, in a dead faint, fell the last ten feet like a rag doll. Sondra and Lock managed to break his fall to some extent.

He was in a terrible condition, like a man flayed alive—but he was alive.

They eased his position as much as they could, and Sondra ran to get water. He was just managing to partially sit up and sip it, when a couple of the sons of the Mullens' family came sauntering back munching lumps of their newly acquired food.

"Well?" said one of them, with his mouth full. "Did you see Heaven again?"

"The slit is closed from without," answered Direk, in a pain-racked voice. "The view is blocked now."

They looked at each other and winked, then burst into raucous laughter.

"As good a tale as any," said the spokesman. "Meanwhile, this is our area. Clear off!"

Sondra and Lock half carried, half dragged Direk back to his own area, where they gently laid him down. He looked as if he would never move again. Lock went to get water to bathe the maltreated wounds.

"Dearest," said Sondra, softly. "I believe in Heaven and all you have said about it, but you don't ever have to worry about taking me there. Wherever I am with you, so long as I am with you, that is Heaven for me."

Direk hid a wry smile, and thought to himself, "There are longings in a man's heart no woman will ever understand."

"And don't be discouraged because the slit is closed," she said.

"Far from that, I am vastly encouraged," he said, in a voice so firm that it surprised her. "You see, man is being paid a compliment. Despite the present appearance of laxness, the seeking of easy pleasures, the selfishness, the seeming lack of imagination, there *is* something in these 'worms' which Dree fears, whatever he boasted. The closing of that slit is an act of fear. He dare not allow man any further glimpses of Heaven. Dree is uneasy on his throne."

To himself he said something it would not be politic to say aloud: "He said there are a hundred ways into Here. To me that means there are a hundred ways out!"

His eyes fell again upon the poor little brown stalk of the flower among the mushrooms. It was brittle now.

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had already broken in two and soon would be dust. He remembered the one-time wondrous blue of it.

"You may fade and vanish," he thought, "but the memory of you and where you came from is a lasting one which I shall not forget!"

THE END

Illustration by Bill Terry

THE SWORDSMEN OF VARNIS

By CLIVE JACKSON

THE twin moons brooded over the red deserts of Mars and the ruined city of Khua-Loanis. The night wind sighed around the fragile spires and whispered at the fretted lattice windows of the empty temples, and the red dust made it like a city of copper.

It was close to midnight when the distant rumble of racing hooves reached the city, and soon the riders thundered in under the ancient gateway. Tharn, Warrior Lord of Loanis, leading his pursuers by a scant twenty yards, realized wearily that his lead was shortening, and raked the scaly flanks of his six-legged vorkl with cruel spurs. The faithful beast gave a low cry of despair as it tried to obey and failed.

In front of Tharn in the big double saddle sat Lehni-tal-Loanis, Royal Lady of Mars, riding the ungainly animal with easy grace, leaning forward along its arching neck to murmur swift words of encouragement into its flattened ears. Then she lay back against Tharn's mailed chest and turned her lovely face up to his, flushed and vivid with the excitement of the chase, amber eyes aflame with love for her strange hero from beyond time and space.

"We shall win this race yet, my Tharn," she cried. "Yonder through that archway lies the Temple of the Living Vapor, and once there we can defy all the Lordes of Varnis!" Looking down at the unearthly beauty of her, at the subtle curve of throat and

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breast and thigh, revealed as the wind tore at her scanty garments, Tharn knew that even if the Swordsmen of Varnis struck him down his strange odyssey would not have been in vain.

But the girl had judged the distance correctly and Tharn brought their snorting vorkl to a sliding, rearing halt at the great doors of the Temple, just as the Swordsmen reached the outer archway and jammed there in a struggling, cursing mass. In seconds they had sorted themselves out and came streaming across the courtyard, but the delay had given Tharn time to dismount and take his stand in one of the great doorways. He knew that if he could hold it for a few moments while Lehni-tal-Loanis got the door open, then the secret of the Living Vapor would be theirs, and with it mastery of all the lands of Loanis.

The Swordsmen tried first to ride him down, but the doorway was so narrow and deep that Tharn had only to drive his swordpoint upward into the first vorkl's throat and leap backward as the dying beast fell. Its rider was stunned by the fall, and Tharn bounded up onto the dead animal and beheaded the unfortunate Swordsman without compunction. There were ten of his enemies left and they came at him now on foot, but the confining doorway prevented them from attacking more than four abreast, and Tharn's elevated position upon the huge carcass gave him the advantage he needed. The fire of battle was in his veins now, and he bared his teeth and laughed in their faces, and his reddened sword wove a pattern of cold death which none could pass.

Lehni-tal-Loanis, running quick cool fingers over the pitted bronze of the door, found the radiation lock and pressed her glowing opalescent thumb-ring into the socket, gave a little sob of relief as she heard hidden tumblers falling. With agonizing slowness the ancient mechanism began to open the door; soon Tharn heard the girl's clear voice call above the clashing steel, "Inside, my Tharn, the secret of the Living Vapor is ours!"

But Tharn, with four of his foes dead now, and seven to go, could not retreat from his position on top of the dead vorkl without grave risk of being cut down, and Lehni-tal-Loanis, quickly realizing this, sprang up beside him, drawing her own slim blade and crying, "Aie, my love! I will be your left arm!"

Now the cold hand of defeat gripped the hearts of the Swordsmen of Varnis: two, three, four more of them mingled their blood with the red dust of the courtyard as Tharn and his fighting princess swung their merciless blades in perfect unison. It seemed that nothing could prevent them now from winning the mysterious secret of the Living Vapor, but they reckoned without the treachery of one of the remaining Swordsmen. Leaping backward out of the conflict he flung his sword on the ground in disgust. "Aw, the Hell with it!" he grunted, and unclipping a proton gun from his belt he blasted Lehni-tal-Loanis and her Warrior Lord out of existence with a searing energy-beam.

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LITTLE MISS IGNORANCE

By E. EVERETT EVANS

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No girl could possibly be as shy or as inexperienced as "Miss Ignorance." She could fix a mechanical brain, demonstrate marvelous knowledge — but a kiss was new!

JAMES FOXE stood on the tarmac at Terramars Field watching the *New York* come down through the tenuous atmosphere. He never tired of this sight of a great liner coming in from Space. The tremendous flares of her braking rockets; the jockeying for the belly landing; the huge tractors towing her up to the tarmac after she'd landed and shut off her rockets.

He watched the passengers disembark. This, too, was always interesting. Sight of new faces was a sensation of pleasure to anyone so far away from Terra.

Suddenly his attention was riveted to a lovely feminine figure coming hesitantly down the gangplank. She was looking about her in a bewildered manner. He started toward her, and her startling beauty made itself more apparent to him.

"Wheeoo!" he whistled. Earth was certainly making them more beautiful every year.

He went up to her.

"Are you assigned yet, Miss?"

"No, sir." She was very shy.

"What is your classification?"

"Speed typist, sir."

She fumbled in her bag and she brought out her passbook.

He glanced through it quickly, whistled again with amazement. She was rated highest efficiency, *plus*.

"I need an expert typist," he said. He smiled. "Would you like to work for me?"

She glanced up at him and he smiled again as winningly as he could while she was studying him.

"Yes," her voice was low, but eager. "Yes, sir, I think it would be nice to work for you."

"All right, I'll fix it. But first, you don't need to call me 'sir' all the time. My name's James Foxe, but my friends all call me 'Jimmy.' I hope you'll be one of those friends."

She smiled shyly again. "I hope so, too . . . Jimmy."

He picked up her bag just as she stooped for it. His arm brushed against the satiny-soft texture of hers, sending a current of pleasure sensations racing through him. How warmly human she was . . .

He found a cab and he took her to the John Storer Engineering offices, where he was assistant to the general manager. He led her into his office. On one of the twin desks of polished plastolite rested a latest model electric typewriter. She gave a little cry of recognition.

"That's the kind I like best. I'm so glad you have one of them, instead of one of the old models. I can work much faster on this."

She stood by it, smiling, and he

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marvelled at the way she ran her hands over it lovingly, caressingly.

Suddenly he found himself wishing she would stroke him in the same way. Why should he wish such a thing?

He went to his own desk and picked up a number of sheets of paper, filled with words and numbers.

"These are what we call 'specification lists'," he explained. "We go over them from time to time, making changes, taking out certain items, adding others. Then they have to be recopied absolutely letter perfect. That is important. These have been revised and are ready for typing."

She nodded her head. He liked the way her silky, blue-black curls bobbed and danced with the movement.

He handed her a number of the pages and he explained about the page numbering, the margins, the spacing.

She took the pages and started typing. Her fingers fairly flashed over the keys of the electrotyper, and when she glanced up at the end of the first page she found him eyeing her with amazement.

"Is anything wrong?" Her voice was husky with the fear that she had displeased him already.

"Wrong? Good Lord, no!" The words were almost an explosion. "I just never saw anyone type that fast before!"

He could tell this pleased her, for she was smiling once more, though still shyly, and the fear-look was gone from her eyes.

"They said at school I was the fastest they'd ever had, but I wouldn't know for sure."

"I can believe you are. Let me see your first page, please."

He studied it carefully and he proofread it for mistakes. There were none. Also, the page was a model of neatness.

He grinned as he handed it back. "The Chief won't believe it when I tell him about you."

That pleased smiled was lurking about her lips as she went back to work.

When dusk brought the closing bell's sound, he took her out and found her a rooming-place near the office. He explained about the hours of work and made sure she knew how to get to the office building.

"Goodnight, Barbara," he smiled.

"Good night . . . Jimmy," he barely heard as he moved away.

During work the next morning Foxe turned to a little box that stood on a small stand beside his desk. He reached out a hand toward it, then stopped and swung about to face his new typist.

"Does it bother you to have music playing while you work, Barbara?"

"I don't know," her voice was doubtful. "I don't think I ever heard any."

"Never heard . . . oh, you mean while working. Well, I like it, so let's try it."

He twisted a couple of knobs, and suddenly a cascade of beautiful melody was spilling out into the room. She stopped working in amazement, a fascinated expression on her face.

"What is that?" she asked breath-

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lessly.

"That's the Grieg Piano Concerto."

"Oh."

The word was small and wondering. She sat, hands idle in her lap, rapt in the wonderful sounds until the number was finished.

"What's a grieg piano concerto, Jimmy?" Her eyes were wide with perplexity.

"Good Lord, Barbara, don't you know anything at all about music?"

She shook her head, eyes clouded. He realized she thought he was displeased with her. He'd never seen anyone so shy, so touchy; had to watch every word and gesture.

"What did they teach you at that school?" There was exasperation in his voice. "I didn't suppose there was anyone who'd never heard about music."

"They started me in on reading and spelling and grammar. Then some elemental arithmetic. After that they started me in on typing. They taught me how to care for and repair my machine, and also how to care for my body. That's all."

He shook his head in disbelief. "Didn't you ever have any *fun?*"

"What is 'fun'?"

"Fun is enjoying yourself doing something you don't have to do, just for the pleasure you get out of it."

"Oh, yes, then I've had fun." Her eyes shone momently, then they dropped shyly again. "But I'm afraid you'll laugh at me if I tell you about it."

"No," he assured her earnestly. "I won't laugh."

"I used to dream about people."

"Little Miss Ignorance," he jeered, but so tenderly that no offense could possibly be taken from his words.

"Could I learn about music?"

"You certainly can. I have quite a large collection of recordings. I'll take you home with me after work and play some for you."

She looked at him doubtfully. "You're sure it is all right for one like me to go with you outside of work?"

"It most certainly is! I'll be glad to help you learn something about music appreciation."

She turned back to her work happily, and her fingers on the typewriter keys were almost a blur of speed the rest of the day.

Foxe was just turning the corner of the hall going to his office the next morning when he saw a tall, harsh-eyed, brassy blonde going through the doorway. Betty Bowser. He wondered why she was going into his office. It couldn't be for any good, he was sure. He hurried up and he eavesdropped shamelessly outside his door.

"Look, Mouse," he heard tones as harsh and brassy as the owner's looks, "you lay off Jim Foxe. I saw him first!"

He could imagine shy, timid little Barbara shrinking back in her seat at that cold, unfriendly, commanding tone. Then he heard her voice, low and tremulous.

"I . . . I'm sorry. I didn't know. I just got here yesterday."

"Fast worker, eh?" the brassy voice sneered. "Well, I'm telling you

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again, lay off! If I catch you going out with him again, there'll be plenty of trouble—and all from me to you."

"Thank you for telling me, Miss," the small, sweet voice was apologetic and conciliatory. "I don't want ever to overstep my place, and you may be sure I shall be careful from now on, not to do so."

Foxe heard a sniff, and there was a pause. Then, "Either you're a dumb 'un, or you're mighty deep. I don't know which yet." Another pause, and he guessed that Bowser was studying the little, pathetic figure before her. "All right, I can see you're just dumb."

The blonde turned and walked out of the office, straight into the arms of James Foxe.

He shook her mercilessly until she almost screamed.

"What do you think you're doing?" Foxe's voice was low, yet anger was making it hard for him to control it. "You're the one that's going to lay off, understand? Yes, you saw me first, but I saw you second. I'm sure I've made it very plain that I want nothing to do with you. I can't stand anyone who acts like you do. Now get out and stay away from me —and from Barbara Greenwood! I mean that both as a threat and a promise that you'll not like what happens if you don't."

He gave her a shove and she stumbled away down the hall. Foxe went into his office.

Barbara was trying to work, but her eyes were tear-misted and she was typing at a bare hundred and fifty words a minute.

Foxe went up to her and he put his hands over hers, gently, stopping the work. She looked up in alarm, but he smiled so companionably her eyes gradually lost the fear-look.

"Don't you ever give a moment's thought to that hussy's words, Barbara," he commanded softly. "She has no hold on me whatsoever, and never did. If you want to go out with me when I ask you to, there is absolutely no one who has the right to tell you 'No.' You believe that, don't you?"

She searched his gray eyes, found a measure of belief in them. She smiled tremulously back at him, and relief dried her tears.

"I'm so glad," she whispered, so low he barely heard.

"Just to show the whole world," he grinned then, "I'll ask you now what I was on my way to ask you when I came in. Will you go to the video with me tonight? They're broadcasting an opera from Terra—it's one of the greatest pieces of music ever written, and different from any I played for you last night."

The frightened look came back into her eyes.

"I want to . . . so much . . . Jimmy . . . but I'm afraid. Are you sure it's all right?"

"Poor Little Miss Ignorance," he fondled her satin-smooth hands. "You've got to forget about that blonde and her talk. I told you there's nothing anyone can or would say or do. And I'll prove it to you, right now. Come with me."

He half-lifted her from her seat, and with his hand on her arm led her

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into the private office of John Storer.

"Chief, this is my new typist, Miss Barbara Greenwood, just in from Terra. She's a whiz, too. Fastest and most accurate typist I've ever seen."

The fatherly-looking figure behind the desk rose and smiled.

"Welcome to our group, Miss Greenwood," he greeted her. "We hope you'll like it here and want to stay with us."

She smiled shyly and made a half-curtsey, but said nothing.

"I brought her in here just now mainly to have you explain something to her," Foxe resumed. "I found out yesterday that she knew nothing about music, but liked it from the first time she heard any when I turned my radio on. So I took her to my place last night and played some records for her, explaining about them. Today, that loud-mouthed Betty Bowser went into my office when I wasn't there, and half-scared Barbara into hysterics by threatening all sorts of things if she ever went anywhere with me again. I told Bobby no one had any right to tell her what she could or could not do in cases like that, but she only half believes me. I want to take her to hear the broadcast of *Tristan Und Isolde* tonight, but she's afraid to go. Tell her, please, whether it is right for her to do so, or not."

Storer turned to Barbara, and his smile was more fatherly than ever.

"Here on Mars, my dear, the only real law of convention is that you do not overstep the bounds of good taste. If you want to go anywhere with Jimmy, you go right ahead. No one has the right to stop you. You'll be both safe and happy with the young pup."

The pleasure sensation came back to Barbara again. She smiled her thanks.

"I'm so glad you told me, sir. It makes me very happy. And I do like to work here, and I hope I can stay here always."

The opera that night was another revelation to Barbara. She sat so still in her seat she hardly seemed to be breathing—only little gasps of enjoyment came out from time to time.

So, too, was the dancing to which Foxe introduced her afterwards. The rhythmic movements were so completely in accord with her very being, that she soon wished they could dance all the time.

Foxe was beginning to be almost amazed at the quickness with which she acquired and retained knowledge of new subjects. He said something of this as they were walking slowly back to her room.

"I don't know anything about how or why," she shook her head in answer to a question. "I hadn't realized how much there was I didn't know. But now, once you tell me things, they just seem to stick in my head. I got a book on music from the library and read it last night, and I seem to remember everything that was in it. It was the same with the dancing; once you showed me the steps, it seemed as though I'd known them all my life."

"Eidetic memory, probably," he mused aloud. Then a thought struck

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him. "How long does it take you to read an ordinary page of print?"

"Why, I don't really know. I just seem to glance at it and know what's there." She looked up in surprise. "Doesn't everyone read like that?"

"I'll say they don't. I can't. You're something special, my dear."

He put his arm about her, and she, having become used to the gesture while dancing, seemed to think it nothing unusual while merely walking along the street. She snuggled up against him in delight.

When they reached her room, they continued their talk.

He put up one hand against her soft, warm cheek, which she rubbed gently against the tenderness of his touch. Suddenly he exerted a bit of pressure, turned her face toward his, and his lips touched hers.

Barbara squirmed a bit at the first contact; then as the delight of it electrified her, she yielded herself completely. She returned his kiss with equal intensity.

"Oh, I like that," she purred when he released her at long last. "What was that?"

He was completely dumfounded. Imagine anyone not knowing a thing like that! Her naivete and ignorance of commonplaces constantly put him off-balance.

"That, Little Miss Ignorance," he recovered at last, "was a kiss. Don't tell me you never heard of kissing."

"I think I read the word once, but I never knew what it was."

Of her own accord she put her arms about his neck and lifted her lips to his for another kiss.

When Foxe finally reached his office the next morning, Barbara was at her desk, her electrotyper nearly dismantled, and herself busily engaged with a number of tools.

"What the . . .?" He looked the amazement he felt.

She glanced up and her face was troubled.

"I don't know what happened. It was working perfectly when I finished last night, but this morning the moment I tried to use it there was a grinding noise, and it stopped and wouldn't start up again."

She soon had it completely apart, as he watched, and she began the rebuilding job, carefully scrutinizing each piece as she replaced it. He remembered her saying she'd been taught to care for and repair her machine, and it was apparent she was as expert in this as she was in its use.

Suddenly she pounced on a bit of metal among the miscellany of parts strewn about her desk.

"That's strange," she pursed her lips as she studied it. "This doesn't belong in here. How do you suppose it got in my typewriter?"

His eyes narrowed. "Give it to me. I have an idea."

He left the room and ran into another. He strode up to the desk and addressed the brassy blonde behind it.

"Here's something of yours, Betty. You should be more careful where you drop things."

She looked up at him, startled. She started to deny that it was anything of her doing, but the determined,

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angry look in his eyes stopped the protest before it was uttered.

"Pack your things and get out!" he commanded. "You're all through here. I'll get your credits and your papers. Be ready to leave when I bring them back."

He stalked angrily from the room and into the auditor's office. When he returned he gave one more emphatic command.

"I told you once before to lay off Barbara Greenwood. Now I'm telling you again. You do one more thing, or say one word to or about her, and you'll be shipped to Mercury. Maybe that will be hot enough for a she-devil like you."

James Foxe came into John Storer's office one day, his face showing trouble.

"Chief, the big electronic calc's out of whack. Won't give the right answers at all."

The other came to his feet in consternation. As the two raced into the calc room, Foxe explained briefly.

They made a careful examination, and questioned the operators. It had suddenly gone hay-wire, that was all anyone knew. Why, was a mystery.

"Have to video Terra for a Technie to come and fix it," Storer grunted as the two returned to his office. "How you coming with those computations on the Monorail job?"

"Only about half done, and there's that Danaris Canal bridge job, too. That's barely started."

"Ouch! And there's a time-limit contract on both of them."

The answer from Terra was bad. It would be impossible, they reported, to send anyone to Mars to fix it for two months at the very earliest.

"Fat lot of good their guarantee does us," Foxe growled. "Well, we'll just have to get everyone possible working on the dope by hand. But we'll never make those jobs on time now."

"We've got to do it, somehow, someway, Jimmy. How, I don't know any more than you do. Just do the best you can. Hire any extra math-men you can."

Foxe was visibly worried as he returned to his own office. Barbara, apparently quick to catch his moods, asked why. He explained.

"Can I help any?"

"Don't know how," was the lugubrious reply. But a moment later he brightened. "Hey, I forgot your special abilities. Drop your ordinary work, go to the library, and start boning up on calculus and tensor problems. In a few days you can really be of a lot of help."

Late that afternoon a brainstorm struck Foxe, and he ran into Storer's office, dragging Barbara with him.

"Say, Chief, I've got an idea. What say we let Bobby have a crack at fixing that big calc. She could study up on electronics for a few days, and I'll bet she can fix it!"

"Have you gone nuts, Jimmy?" The elder peered at him closely. "That's no job to entrust to an amateur. It's much too complicated. There're only about a dozen Technies on Terra who can fix a calculator."

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"I'll still bet she could do it. Look, Chief! Bobby reads a page at a glance, and she has eidetic memory. She's trained to care for and repair machines, even if she hasn't yet tackled anything as complicated as that calc."

"You certainly have faith in her. What do you say, Barbara?"

Eyes gleaming in anticipation, she nodded vigorously. "I'd like to try it. I've worked on some pretty complicated electronic bodies."

Storer considered the matter for some time, frowning in concentration. They needed that machine, no fooling—how they needed it! Abruptly he came to a decision.

"It's worth taking a chance on. I'll get some of the best textbooks, and the blueprints of the machine."

For the next couple of days Barbara did little but read. Then she studied the blueprints of the huge, room-sized calculator. Finally, she spent one whole day just looking at it and comparing it with the lay-out. Finally she said she thought she was ready to attempt the repair.

Carefully, methodically, she started dismantling the section thought to be off. She carefully marked each part she removed to correspond with a mark she put on the blueprints. Each she also thoroughly examined to see that it was still the correct shape and dimensions, and had been correctly hooked-up according to the specifications.

Days passed, and still she worked ceaselessly. Other engineers and technicians, hearing about what she was attempting, came in briefly to watch. Mostly they pooh-poohed the idea that she could fix it. One or two grudgingly admitted she was going at it the right way, but doubted the final outcome.

"The big slugs are just jealous!" Foxe exploded. "None of 'em have brains enough to fix the thing, so they won't concede that anyone else can either."

"Calm down, Jimmy," Storer advised, laughing. "I'm satisfied now that Barbara knows what she's doing. Whether she gets it working or not is another matter. But I'm not taking her off the job."

But as the days grew many it was Barbara herself who became more and more distressed.

"I can't do it, Jimmy," she sobbed disconsolately in his arms. "It's just too much for me. I've learned the operating principle, but I'm just not enough of a technician to know how or where to look for the trouble."

"Nonsense," he declared loyally, kissing away her tears. "I'm betting on you, remember? My Little Miss Ignorance is going to show them all she has the best brain on this planet. You just keep plugging, Bobby—you'll win out!"

And so, plug along she did. Bit by bit she began to understand what was supposed to be accomplished by each of the intricate parts, and how it should work as a whole. She knew, now, exactly what to look for, and how to find it.

One glorious day, she found the trouble. As is so often the case, it had been caused by a very small

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thing, indeed. A wire-end had become unsoldered, and twisted about the wires of a nearby Selectron grid, short-circuiting it.

Quickly she fastened the wire where it belonged, replaced the burned-out unit, and began testing.

But that Selectron section would not work.

Over and over she adjusted and tested. It was out of phase somehow. It couldn't "remember" correctly the integer fed into it. Someway, before the electrons reached the grid, the bars and rings became negatively charged, and refused them.

She tried replacing various tubes, trying to see if one of those was damaged. As far as she could tell they were all right. She checked over all the nearby wiring circuits. Over and over she adjusted and tested. And again . . . and again. . . .

Foxe came in one day to find her working away, tears streaming from her eyes, saying tonelessly, "I can't do it; I can't do it"—but still working doggedly.

But perseverance, coupled with such tremendous latent mental abilities as Barbara was slowly beginning to demonstrate she possessed, must produce results. After she had made a hundred trials—and failures—she sat down and analyzed what she had done each time, and the results she had obtained. Before long she had a patternized picture of why those various attempts had not worked.

Then, by pure deductive reasoning, she worked out the phasing that should be necessary. She found the cause, corrected it . . . and the Selectron "remembered"; positive charges remained positive, and the cells accepted them.

Satisfied at last, she began the tremendous job of reassembling the entire machine. After further arduous days it was done.

She came into Jimmy's office her dress torn and filthy with grease and grime. Her hair was a mess, her face streaked with more of the grease and dirt. She was utterly weary, but managed a smile of satisfaction.

"Jimmy, it's all ready to try out. Oh, please, please, Jimmy, go quickly and see if it works. And Jimmy, I couldn't stand it if it doesn't!"

He ran into the calc room. When her slower steps had caught up with him he was feeding integrals of a tensor problem into the machine. Tubes lighted, relays clicked, and grids, condensors, coils and other parts seemed to be functioning as he watched closely. Finally the answer came out.

"Yeow! It works, darling, it works!"

He grabbed her around the waist. He swung her off the floor, hugged her and kissed her excitedly and enthusiastically.

John Storer and several others, hearing the commotion, came running in. Foxe triumphantly showed them the problem and the answer.

"It's a fairly simple one, I know, but it shows the thing's running. Somebody feed it a really hard one. I'm still betting it'll answer correctly."

It did.

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Barbara was lauded and feted by the entire organization. Yet through it all she remained demure and shy. She never, in any way, attempted to take advantage of the new stature she was now accorded, although her pleasure in their praise was evident.

John Storer began the habit of calling her often into his private office, not only for more and more exacting work — she was promoted from a mere typist's job—but just to talk to her. It was clear that he, too, was falling under the spell of her charm, and had a real respect for her growing mental abilities.

Foxe and Barbara continued to go around together during some of their free hours, while their time together in the office was a continual delight because of their enjoyment of each other's fine personality.

They went to ball games, to lectures, to concerts, to the video, and for long walks during which they talked with increasing intimacy on almost every subject under distant So'.

Because of the pleasure sensations she received from these new cultural experiences, and from the new sciences she was discovering and studying from books, Barbara paid little attention to her physical surroundings. The fact that she was on an alien planet apparently meant nothing to her. The ancient ruins she gave scarcely a glance. The ever-present iron-rust sand received no notice. Her work, music, dancing, study . . . and her companionship with Jimmy . . . these were now her life.

"I get more amazed every day at the simple, ordinary things about which Barbara has never heard," Foxe said to John Storer one day, as they were talking in the latter's office. "I just can't imagine anyone, anywhere, leading such a sheltered life as she must have done, to be so ignorant of so many commonplace things."

"I don't know what sort of a School she went to," the elder replied thoughtfully, "but it certainly didn't teach her much about life. Just the things she needed for her work, apparently. I think it was a mistake."

"You and me both, Chief. But it is certainly wonderful the way she grasps the essential details of a new subject, once it's presented to her. What a brain! I sometimes almost have a feeling of inferiority when I see how that flashing mind of hers digests facts so swiftly."

It was, indeed, becoming plain that Barbara was becoming far more than the "Little Miss Ignorance" Foxe still affectionately called her. With growing knowledge, and with the realization that she could do such exacting things as fixing that calculator, she gradually lost some of her timidity, yet never overcame her endearing modesty.

They were returning in a taxi from another evening excursion, and as was now usual, he kissed her.

Suddenly he straightened with determination.

"Bobby, darling, I must have you

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all for myself for always. Not just during work and these too-short evening hours once or twice a week. I want to marry you."

At these words she shrank back into the far corner of the seat. Her eyes clouded with tears of pain and shock. Her body shuddered as though agued.

"Oh, no, Jimmy! No! You can't mean that!"

He looked at her with puzzled eyes. He'd never been so startled by anyone's reaction.

His hands moved aimlessly toward her, but this time without touching.

"Why, Bobby, why not? We've so much in common. We always have such fun together. And you must know how I feel about you. I haven't said it before in words, I know. But I'm sure my every look and action must have told you how much I love you."

She gave a little moan of pain and shook her head in slow negation. Her curls danced even while the pain in her beautiful eyes deepened.

"But I never did, Jimmy," the small voice was a wail. "I'd not have continued going out with you if I'd known. You *must* believe that!"

"But why, darling? We'd fit so perfectly together. It's been that way ever since the first day we met. Remember?"

"I thought you *knew*, Jimmy. Honestly, I thought you *knew!*"

The car stopped before her apartment house. She jumped out, and held the door so he couldn't follow.

"You go ask Mr. Storer. He'll tell you why I can't possibly marry you. I'm sure he knows."

She turned and ran swiftly into the house.

He sat silently for a moment. *What* was he supposed to have known? Finally he gave his chief's address to the driver.

"What on Earth, or Mars, rather, makes you get me out of bed at this hour?" Storer asked, admitting him to his apartment.

"It's Barbara," said Foxe. "I'm all at sea, and she said you'd know the answer."

"Answer to what?"

"Well, I asked her to marry me, tonight, and she broke it off sharp, and ran, saying it was impossible, and didn't I know why she couldn't possibly marry me."

Storer looked puzzled. "Should I know why?"

"Apparently. Up to now it's always been her that didn't seem to know much about anything, just as if they never taught her at school; and now, for the first time, she accuses me of not knowing something. I . . ."

Storer looked startled. "Jimmy! You're right. There were dozens of little primary things she didn't know. As if she'd missed out on the elementary classes. Can it be . . ."

Foxe paled. "You don't mean that she. . ."

Storer groaned. "Of course! That's it. She naturally wouldn't know about the rest of us, if she missed her first grades. Heavens, Jimmy, no telling what she'll do. She might try anything, without the primary emotional

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foundation she should have."

Storer dived for his clothes. "We've got to get to her!"

In a moment he was ready, and together the pair of them dashed to the street, where the taxi still waited. Foxe gave Barbara's address. "Hurry, driver! It's a matter of life and death!"

Both men sat tense and silent as the taxi tore through the deserted streets. Neither spoke until the cab screeched to a halt before Barbara's apartment. Then they piled out and ran into the building. Foxe jabbed the bell under her name, and waited in an agony of suspense. There was no answer.

"Never mind that!" snapped Storer. "We've got to break in."

He pushed one big shoulder against the door, and Foxe hurled his own weight against it also. The lock snapped and catapulted them inside. They raced down the hallway to Barbara's door, and Storer pounded on it. There was no response, and without waiting another second, they plunged against it and hurtled it inward.

Lying on the floor near the opposite wall was Barbara, her head wound around with a loose coil of copper wire. She was sobbing, and one white hand was pushing the plug on an extension wire into the electric light socket.

"Quick!" shouted Storer. "She's trying to short-circuit her brain!"

Foxe hurled his body forward, kicked almost savagely at her hand, smashing the plug to fragments against the wall. Barbara screamed and went limp on the floor.

"Too late!" sobbed Foxe, dropping to the floor beside her and cradling her head in his arms.

"No," said Storer. "Even if a contact was made, it was only for a fraction of a second. There'd have been no time for a serious rise in temperature in the brain. She's only fainted, I'm sure."

It was true. Barbara's eyes opened almost instantly and she stared up at Foxe, then she threw herself into his arms and began sobbing wildly. "Why did you stop me, Jimmy? I can't marry you! Don't you know I'm only a robot? I'm not a human being at all."

"Of course not," said Storer, almost roughly. "You ignorant little android! Nor are we."

She stopped sobbing. Slowly she lifted her head and stared up at him.

"What?" she said uncomprehendingly. "You're not . . ."

". . . Human," finished Storer. "Naturally not. *Nobody* on Mars is human. Couldn't possibly live here if we were. We're all android robots. Didn't you learn that in your primary classes on Earth?"

"Primary classes . . ." she faltered. "What's a primary class . . .?"

Foxe clutched her to him and showered her lips with kisses. "Never mind what, Little Miss Ignorance," he said. "You missed them somehow, but it doesn't matter; I'm going to have a lot of fun teaching you what any android should have known the day she came off the assembly line!"

THE END

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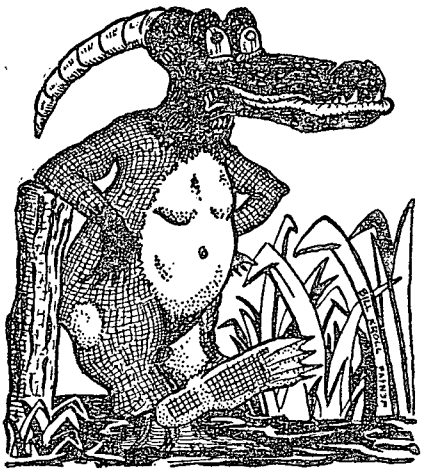
THE MUTE QUESTION

By FORREST J. ACKERMAN



TWINHEAD was puzzling over the old problem. "Do you think," he reflected, in the queer lisp that was the heritage of his cleft tongue, "that Man could have made mutant in his own image?"

His acquaintance of the twilight hour vouchsafed no opinion.

The mutant's second head arched its neck forward from the cave wall against which it rested. With its twang, characteristic of its double tongue, it argued, "But if Man's son, Adam, created us all with the Adam bomb—?"

"I don't hold with that Bomb birth story," his opposite head lisped in negation. "Do you, stranger?"

Still the stranger did not respond; why, it could not be directly discerned, for it was very dark in the cave.

Twang-tongue declared: "But for Man to have made mutie in His own image, He would have had to have been a polymorph! Part of Him would have had to have been two-headed, like us, and part like our Siamese sisters and part like little Roll Ball and part like the Octo-Arms we met last week and part like the Centi-Feets and part like our cousin Snaky. Why, He would have been a monster! Don't you agree, stranger?"

In the dark recess of the cave the stranger stirred, but still no sound issued from his direction. And so this philosophical discussion of the late 1990s stalemated itself.

Then the moon's clouded rays, slowly, as though fearful of what they might reveal, crept into the cave. The wavering shaft moved hesitantly up the misshapen body of Twinhead, and at last reluctantly illumined the entire mutie. Was it an illusion, or did the face of the Man in the Moon pale? There was no man left on Earth to tell.

The beam's slow progress continued, until the second mutie too was visible. Then it became evident why this stranger did not speak.

Rather, it must be put this way: It would have become evident, had there been a man there with eyes to see. It remained a mystery to Twinhead for, though he had more than his share of eyes—six, to be exact—they were all albino white, pupilless ovals of jellyfish flesh that failed to function. Twinhead, since birth, was blind.

And the stranger — well, he was silent because . . .

The Muties have a proverb: Two heads are better than *none*.

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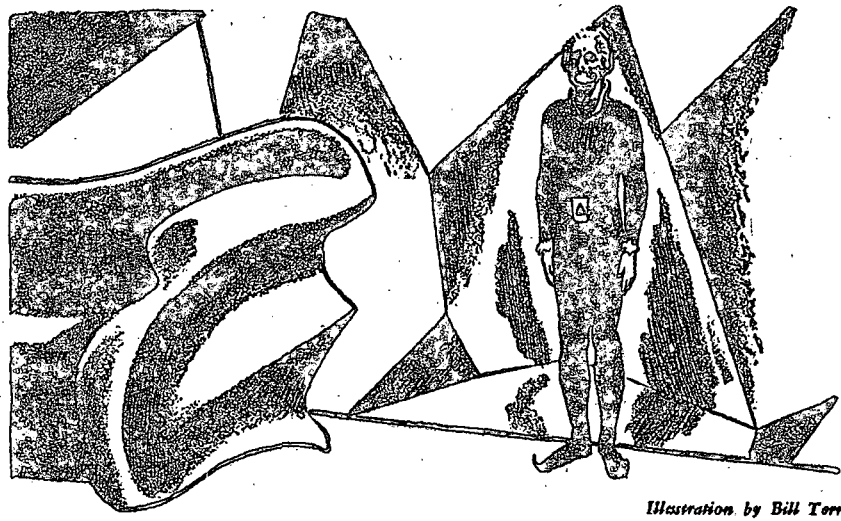

Illustration by Bill Terry

PALACE OF DARKNESS

By PETER DEXTER

Out of the spaceship came a horde of invaders who were the strangest invaders a world has ever seen—because they wanted only to serve!

SALLY noticed it first. She said: "How dim the sun is getting, and thank Heaven, its cooling off!"

I got up and looked at the sky. It was a perfectly clean sky, rather a dark blue—but no clouds! The sun was almost overhead, exactly where it should have been, but it wasn't right! It was too dim a sun for a hot July day!

I sat down again, and a strange feeling crept over me, one that felt like going down in a fast elevator. I looked at Sally suddenly with a new feeling which was born of the strange sun and dim sky. It was as if the end of the world had come and I might never see her again. She was certainly a nice looking wife! I wished she were my wife, instead of Jim's! "Mrs. Richard Wagner" . . . I wished I could call her that.

Sally was the steno in the hotel office. We were sitting on the roof, eating our lunch, as we often did. That's probably why we noticed this oddity so long before others.

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But by one o'clock the dimness had become an inexplicable and total darkness! The radios were blaring ponderous official explanations of the "weird phenomenon." They were the kind of explanations even a bell-boy,

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like me, could see through, and tell they didn't know what they were talking about—and that was one day they didn't!

The newspapers were thundering out new editions, and the newsies were rushing around doing a land-office business. I noticed some people starting to gather on the church steps down the street. The pastor came and unlocked the doors and left them wide open for people to come to him . . . his explanation would be the "second coming," or something reassuring. I remember thinking kind of jokingly about asking the pastor for a job as usher, as I could see a church usher was going to get more tips than a bell-boy for awhile. Then, I remembered that an usher only passed the plate for the church, and abandoned the idea.

Yes, darkness wasn't new, but that day it started at noon!

I'm only a bell-hop in the Ambassador. My name is Richard Wagner, and my friends call me Dick. I'm "big for my age." That's a joke, you see, because altho' I am eighteen I always say I'm sixteen, because I'm ashamed of being just a bell-hop. Besides, women tip a fellow better if they think he is just a kid. I am almost six feet tall. Although no one goes out of his way to call me the athletic type, most of the other bell-hops are hard to find when it comes to hefting someone's trunks around. I should never have let anyone find out how strong I really am.

Some of the gushy female guests remark on my pretty blue eyes and my nice wavy hair. I don't like it, but I guess my appearance pays me off in cash—that is, it did before Queen Fal took over. That's one time my appearance got me into trouble.

You know, Queen Fal is the real story behind the darkness. I've already told you about women tipping me better than men. Well, Queen Fal gave me a tip too—I'm still suffering from the effects.

You remember how terrible the darkness was to everyone the first two weeks? The world was turning upside down, what with the riots and phony prophets and religious people gathering for the "second coming" and all.

I think the radio silence was the worst, for everyone expected comforting, believable explanations from the scientists, but no reputable name had one he would stick out his neck on. When one of them tried, everybody knew it was a phony.

Then, that monstrous ship of Queen Fal's floated down over Washington, and all the television sets gave forth with shots of it hanging over the capitol. It hung there, a huge bubble of light in the unnatural darkness. There seemed to be something "blessed" about it! An "angel of light," everyone thought, bringing deliverance. How wrong they were!

That musical, sugary voice of Fal's offered to banish the darkness. She spoke pretty good English, which in itself was a dead give-away if anyone had thought about it in that way. It struck fear into the government—or was it fear—did she do something else to make them stick by her? No one knew for sure although they heard,

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after awhile, that Fal was running things. Queen Fal, their blessed angel, was going to take away the nasty darkness and give the people their nice warm sun again.

"My people, I have come to remove this curse of darkness! From a far place, I have heard of your disaster, and have rushed to your relief . . ."

Remember? "My people" . . . those were the first words she ever used, in Washington! And they didn't shoot her down out of that evil sky because she handed out her benevolent "super-suds" by the gallon! President Fuman's record for gullibility and damn-foolishness reached a new high. If they had shot her down then, it would have gotten light in a hurry . . . but how could they know that? They accepted her as a savior from the skies! It still gives me a pain!

It *is* a whopping big ship, you know. You can't really blame them for not attacking it.

When Fal took over the government, you would have thought someone would make some kind of effort, some public protest, or do something to at least save face. A lot of us used to wonder how she worked it. I found out, later that Fal could make a monkey out of anybody. Her "Blackies" were smooth customers in that they had that peculiar unity of theirs, which intensified military co-ordination. . . . We thought maybe the "Blackies" were robots, the way they moved, so silent, quiet, and slick. We still had a lot to learn.

President Fuman thought these "Blackies" were super-men. He gave in to all of Fal's demands until she finally had everything in her hands. When she waved one of those long, gemmed lunch-hooks of hers, and the light came on again . . . the President was sure they were supermen as were a lot of the big-shots. The smart ones, however, were quietly getting themselves and their resources under as much cover and as far away as possible.

Yes, she practically landed that ship on the White House lawn—and promised to give her people their sweet sun back again! That is, after "Domeenion hahd been eestableeshed . . . for the best interests of all concerned . . ."

Of course our stuffy little president hadn't expected the rather frightening "Blackies" to stay! He probably thought they meant to move in that way to keep people from being hurt, to make sure no one on our "ignorant and dangerous little world" would attack them! No one knew *what* he thought! When Fal was staging the show, no one cared!

Every technical eye in the Pentagon glittered avariciously at sight of that ship! They certainly would have made an attempt to take her over if they hadn't been forced to listen to the president. And they probably would have succeeded!

Even the gullible President thought he smelled a rat after the first few days, but he wasn't sure, and Fal was a supreme actress . . . also her "Blackies" were smooth, fast workers. People were soon wondering how so many of them had managed to get

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in even such a big ship—for while the first few days there seemed only a thousand or less . . . after a week there were two thousand, and then they were everywhere. It was like magic!

Of course the public never did get the real story as to what went on behind the scenes those first few days. They probably did try to resist Fal and had gotten themselves cut down to size for it. Nothing ever got out those days, was all we knew. But I learned . . . *I learned.*

Queen Fal had a sure instinct for the dramatic. I think it was this flare of hers that made the conquest so easy for her. She made them all wear black tights, white egret feathers, white hair and stiffening lotion on their faces that gave them that frightening, immovable mask instead of a face. Most people thought they were mechanical robots, and for that reason didn't resent them as one would have expected.

Later on as we came to know Fal she was the same to us as Hildegarde, Bob Hope or other characters who were always before the public eye. The President was forgotten, and I doubt if anyone missed him much except the people who could no longer get money out of the treasury on his say-so. It was Queen Fal on the billboards, on the telenews, wherever you turned! So swiftly, so surely, she and her cohorts took over the U. S. A.—and I suppose, the world. I didn't pay much attention to the rest of the world, as there wasn't much real news after the first few days. I guess Russia, even in the palmiest days of the G.P.U., had never seen anything as efficient as this way of silently removing enemies and replacing them with puppets in black tights with stiff faces. It is funny how you don't worry about what you don't hear about. The news was more sure in her hands than it had ever been with the Iron Curtain . . . and she choked free speech quicker than she did the golden American goose.

Somewhere, in a secret place they had built a vast light-control machine. There was a lot of barber-shop and pool-room speculation on how it was done, but not a word in the papers. Fancy theories were bandied about by all the local big-wigs, but no one really knew, 'til the flicker came . . . but that was later. The way I had it figured, they had some way of changing the ionization of the upper layers of the atmosphere, the ionospheres. This made the upper air into a perfect mirror, so instead of letting light through, it reflected it. However, there was probably a lot more to it than that. I've heard electrical engineers say that light itself and its conduction is not really understood —but that all Fal had to do was make the conductor of light into a non-conductor. This might be easy to do—if one knew enough about the real nature of light. Of course, those frighteningly silent "Blackies" of Fal's never talked about anything, and one could hardly expect Fal to give away the secret of her power.

They kept one spot on Earth in eternal darkness. Funny spot to pick, too. . . . Death Valley . . . something

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about it took Fal's eye, and it was there she started building. The news didn't have much to say anymore, so it played this up big, and called it "The Palace of Darkness," ran endless photographic studies of it and of the surrounding terrain—it got tiresome.

She kept an area of about twenty square miles in total darkness. The photos of the place were made with flash bulbs, seldom showing more than a few small details . . . a doorway or a sculpture with some silent, screwy looking "Blackie" working on it with those alien tools of his. Some pictures were of long white glowing stairs with Queen Fal coming dramatically down them, that beautiful body of hers dressed to kill . . . for the press. Dressed to kill . . .

We didn't know about the killing, then. We never heard a word about the real news. We were a nation of prisoners, trying to pretend the horror wasn't there! The whole nation made a historic reputation for complete naïveté, for . . . gullibility. The president wasn't alone, it had become a national trait!

I often think they must have landed in the desert first, set up the light-control mechanisms, and tried them out on a small scale before they widened the range to include the whole nation, and finally the whole Earth. They decided to build there because they had caches of material there, which they'd accumulated from repeated trips. Of course that was guess work, but those guesses of mine were what led me to go there. I wanted to know for sure what it was all about, and as a bell-hop, with a nose for tips, I figured where else would the money be? I wasn't the only one to figure that angle out. How could I know a "Blackie" had no use for money?

Times got pretty hard, and people started gravitating toward her, just like chickens do when they see the woman with the corn. Queen Fal had plenty of corn, as Bob Hope probably observed, but he didn't do it out loud, not those days.

It wasn't hard to get a job in the place . . . as a servant. Americans don't take to jobs like that, as a rule, but a bell-hop develops calloused emotions. It didn't worry me any, then. There was plenty else to keep my mind occupied.

My mind revolved around Fal, herself. I saw quite a lot of her, though never face to face, at first. I wondered about her origins, her purposes, her nature. I wondered about the world she came from, and I wondered about the silent, automaton "Blackies." And I shivered a little, visualizing what it must be like on that world.

She was beautiful, yet there seemed to be a cold blight on her beauty. There was something demoniac, yet hidden, so that you felt it after she was gone, and wondered what you were trying to associate with the thought of her? Maybe it was something one's mind refused to think about!

She was well rounded, deceptively slender, quite tall, and a lot more supple than an earth woman. She had a kind of stage presence so that when

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she came in every eye turned and every person was instantly affected—but not the way you would think. Affected with a kind of delicious shiver, a hesitant non-acceptance of her claim to humanity, a kind of inward revulsion which was yet mingled with a great attraction. It was a sensation which was hard to put your finger on, hard for the mind to grasp. She was essentially alien to an Earthman's experience of life. She knew this, and she spread sugar—on her glances, in her voice, and with her gestures. But always, underneath, one knew . . . something too dreadful to know consciously.

I think it was this deep essential quality of being alien, and her spite for all Earth's people . . . "My people," she still called us.

Her forces, the "Blackies," as people came to call them from the first news flashes about them, had been trained to be completely self-effacing. They were so successful at this that one thought of them as a part of Fal, as one thinks of the fingers as part of the hand.

I used to wonder about that quality of self-effacement about them. I got the answer eventually, as it was the secret of Fal's power!

She was sexy, like a big cat is sexy. There was a dreadful purr in her throat, an enticing bedroom look in her eye—it was like thinking of going to bed with a panther! Yet she never trusted anyone near her but those tall, dead-pan black-clothed servitors of hers.

She was very tall, and strong, too, with a supple, elastic, inexhaustible strength, smooth muscles perfectly covered with that funny skin of hers. Her skin was a translucent white, not like ours at all and there was not a bump on her body. She had proportionately small breasts, and quite feminine hips and small shoulders. But there was power all through the height of her—like a dagger in a silken sheath. She grew on you hypnotically, the better you knew her. Everyone's thoughts revolved around her and fear of the power she had acquired over Earth so rapidly People were dizzy from too much of Queen Fal.

I suppose the big-shots accepted her the way they accept Lewis. He can shut off the supply of coal anytime so he has a lot of people by the throat that way. Fal could shut off the very sunlight, if she didn't get her way, and she got her way.

I corresponded with Sally, and after her husband Jim died of the flu, she came to work in the palace too. Maybe she came to cheer me up as the place was, in truth, like a morgue.

Sally and I used to walk around looking at it when we were off duty. The place was stupendous! It should have been, considering how many "Blackies" Fal had put to work building it. So many people wondered where the numerous black-clad workmen came from? Did they all come out of one ship . . . ?

It was a gigantic place. When it was lighted up with that weird lighting Fal went for, which was just enough to see your way around, one could never figure out where it came

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from.

The real source of the light was the black stuff they made the blocks out of as it was self-luminous. They brought the formula with them, of course. The huge, black masses were picked out by the strange luminosity clinging to them and the whole thing was as alien to a human architect's ideas as the Genie's palace in the Arabian nights. It was just about as useful, too, to anyone except Fal.

There were tremendous spiraling stairs, and those weird "blackies" sprang up them like automatons whose legs never tired. The long balustraded galleries overlooked the desert dunes and the cactus. Some of the plants from Fal's native planet now growing in the darkness, and the desert plants themselves, were all turning white and dying from lack of light.

"Palace of Darkness"—the place was as weird and forbidding to a human as a palace of the dead! All the human employees walked in a soft silent tread and had long faces, like one going to a mortician to see a dead friend.

Funny, it wasn't until Sally came that Queen Fal even noticed me. Maybe I never smiled till she came, which would explain it. A smile would stand out there like a red necktie at a formal dinner. Since I was wearing it for Sally's benefit . . . of course she noticed me . . . and I used to think I was lucky!

There were three big gardens that were enclosed by domes. At first, I couldn't tell if they were glass domes or solid rock—then I noticed the stars were visible through them. Sally and I used to walk in these gardens. We talked mostly about Fal and what her "Blackies" were doing to our country. It was the one place in the whole palace that smelled good—to us. There were tremendous plants with flowers that gave off perfumes — unearthly perfumes that stimulated a person in more ways than one.

The domes were full of vast white-leaved monstrosities which were frightening to an Earth-man's eye. Some looked carnivorous, and I suppose they were. Some were very beautiful delicate-leaved ferns, and there were other things like man-size "Jack-in-the-Pulpits," that flowered in tall spires of purple and rose and amber. These gave off that heady, intoxicating fragrance in such quantities that it made one's head swim. We knew that Fal walked in her own gardens at times, and rather looked forward to running into her, and maybe having a private bit of conversation. We had only seen her at a distance, or passing by with a bunch of "Blackies" and a worried looking Earth big-shot or two.

I was rapidly getting to the point of telling Sally I loved her, although I didn't, really. I didn't even know what love meant, then. But she liked me and I admired her, and the two of us had no other real friends in the place. It was a queer atmosphere, unnatural for two normal youngsters like Sally and me. We were sort of pushed together like two kids in the dark—who were seeking mutual pro-

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tection from the bogey-men.

The white balustraded stairs ran down from the private—and forbidden—second floor right between two of the big domes. They ended in a little court which was surrounded by three ornately decorated openings into the three gardens. It was a private spot and few people came there after hours. We had lost track of day and night and went by a system of time called "hours" and "after hours." I didn't know, for sure, whether these periods were the same as day and night outside the area of darkness or not.

One day "after hours," Sally and I were standing in this little court talking. There wasn't a living soul in sight but us—so I kissed her for the first time. I was blushing and feeling a little excited and proud that she had let me kiss her. Neither of us heard the Queen come down those stairs, or maybe she came out of one of the domes. We didn't know how long she had been standing there watching us.

We were surprised, and a little embarrassed at being caught in the act. Both of us smiled, and tried to look friendly. She almost smiled, or we imagined that she tried to smile. Then a sudden fear hit us. A fear of . . .

Fal came silently toward us from among those monstrous plants and stood in the big arched doorway. The doorway was covered with sculpture from another planet, gloomy arabesques and distorted figures.

Fal paused there, watching us with that expressionless face of hers. That's a trick few Earth faces can manage. Still, an expressionless face can tell one a lot.

She had wide-curved sullen lips, deep shadowed eyes, strong high cheek-bones, and a too-pointed chin. Her pure white hair had a startling luxuriousness, and gave her an air of being even older than she looked. She also had an air of unnaturalness hard to describe.

Queen Fal stood there, looking us over. She made it very embarrassing by not speaking and made us feel as if we shouldn't be there. That smooth, symmetrical dancer's body of hers was so disturbing to a man's eyes with its powerful appeal to sex which was in no way concealed by the gleaming black tights.

Embroidered on the black silken fabric were many down-pointing flames of scarlet and orange. The black ended at the perfect breasts, leaving them nested and startlingly revealed in a soft transparent white stuff—a devastating effect for a susceptible male. Her hands were gaudy with gems, like a maharanee's. She wore a tiara of wire gold, with several points, and on the big center point was one great black jewel with a kind of ruddy flame flickering in the center. No woman of Earth would have worn a costume so morbidly suggestive of an executioner . . . or was it something else gave that impression, some terrible reality of meaning beyond an Earth-man's experience?

She stood, and I could not help but feel she was pleased as a peacock at our fascinated regard and felt

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she was allowing us the privilege of drinking in her beauty. I don't think she would have moved as long as we kept on looking with our slack mouths registering complete awe and fascination . . .

At last, after we were thoroughly embarrassed by her silent, seeming disapproval of our presence, we turned to go, murmuring, "Please excuse us . . ." Then she spoke.

"Whoa ah youa? Whah ah youa doeeing heah?"

That's what her accent sounded like, when she didn't bother speaking perfect English. She could; I had heard her on broadcasts.

Sally answered, as I couldn't for a dryness in my throat. She said:

"I am a stenographer, hired by the palace personnel-director last week. I am off-duty. This is my friend, Richard Wagner, who has been here for several months. He is in charge of the gardeners' clothing lockers, and their tool rooms."

She did smile then, and her smile was more shocking than her rigid face and silence had been. Disregarding Sally, she looked at me, her eyes hungry . . . yet not friendly, not offering friendship or favoritism. As a bell-boy I could have spotted her as a non-tipper a mile away. She would be the type who expected everything for as little as possible. There was just an insatiate hunger in her smile —and yet I wasn't sure exactly what the hunger meant? She wanted something of me that she meant to get— I knew that. But I was pretty sure I did not want to learn the nature of that something!

Sally's face went suddenly pallid as if she had seen death itself.

The meeting with her was the same as the deadly thrill of facing a huge venomous snake unexpectedly. I have been scared of lots of things, but nothing had ever given me that flood of sudden shock to the nerves like Fal. It was like standing on the lip of a precipice with the thrill of danger tingling through all your limbs. At least you can be fairly sure of your feet, but with Fal, you weren't sure of anything.

Sally and I both knew what was on her mind. My hotel experience had taught me that women usually took to me, and Sally remembered that. It had been a joke around the hotel. Sally was frightened for me, I noticed, with a little tingle of pride.

Fal didn't say any more. She didn't reprove us, smile, laugh, or act human in any way. She moved on, as silent and somehow dreadful as a ghost. Sally and I stood there like two babes in the wood after the old witch had caught them eating gingerbread.

Sally moaned, "Oh Dick!" After a long look at me Sally went on: "And that woman has our free land of America in the palm of her hand. It seems impossible that the "Blackies" could help her take everything away from us so easily. Remember when we used to sing in school— 'Sweet land of liberty . . .' Now she's absolute despot of everything! Isn't there any hope?"

I shrugged. "Better not talk that way, Sally! If our people are ever going to be free, it won't be helped by

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little girls who have loose tongues. However, I don't believe that everyone on Earth is taking this thing lying down! Somewhere, sometime, maybe not even in our lifetime, but inevitably, men will fight again for freedom. Just now they are too puzzled by the 'Blackies' ' strange equipment, by the big space ship, by Fal's stage management. That won't last. Now let's not ever talk about it again while we work in this . . . 'Palace of Darkness.' "

Next day, I was transferred from my job in the gardeners' lockers to assistant to the Queen's wardrobe chief. An actress has to have expert costuming, and Fal's wardrobe conformed extensively. I soon found it was like being a total prisoner, as no one could get in or out of the Queen's quarters without a special pass.

There were a lot of "Blackie" guards always in evidence, and these immediately took to eyeing me with a malevolent, curious look which I decided was jealousy.

I thought maybe it was because Fal treated me as a personal servant, while she treated them as furniture. I was the only Earth-man in her extensive wing of the palace.

After the first day, I knew she had given me the job because my reactions amused her. Her effect upon me must have been of intrigue to her, so she decided to play cat and mouse with me, to see what . . . I wasn't ever sure, exactly what she wanted.

Fal seldom wore a garment twice. She got her new outfits at the dressmakers on the other side of the wing. It was her habit to disrobe in front of me and enjoy watching me trying not to look at her, or be too clumsy in my effort to be useful. I hung up the discarded clothes with the hundreds of others in racks, and that was the extent of my duties.

I think perhaps what amused Fal were my efforts not to allow my mind to occupy itself with her . . . particularly as there was no one else in the place but the "Blackie" servants—The thought was always running through my mind—were they robots, or were they just perfectly trained people? They were so like a corps of dancers in their unified co-ordination, in their symmetrical motions—like a bunch of puppets with the same set of strings. It seemed they thought with but one brain—and that was Fal's.

Fal's wardrobe chambers were run like that stage presence precision of the ballet. The "Blackies" in their skin-tight silks stood as motionless as statues, never spoke, never moved, except when the Queen dropped a gown, a shoe, or bracelet.

That was the place I had been transferred to, to become a part of that monotonous waiting for the Queen's arrival—and was given nothing else to occupy my mind except *her* day after day.

I couldn't get a pass to get out to see Sally—and she never came to see me.

I soon learned the Queen had something else in store for me. The first day she came in, I stood there, feeling as out of place in that crew of perfect servants as a flivver in a

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Cadillac sales-room. She came in with all the dynamic zip and commanding stage presence that was hers—and stood for a minute just looking at me! Then she motioned me to come nearer, and slipped off a star-sprinkled bit of veil she wore on her hair and handed it to me. None of the "Blackies" moved to take it. I stood there, holding it, looking at her, my face reddening deeper and deeper.

The place was full of oddly angled mirrors, and each mirror was repeating this scene. The scene was that of Fal with her enigmatic face that seemed to smile but didn't, and the rows of motionless servants. This picture, set against the alien motifs painted on the walls, gave a very theatrical effect. Then Fal laughed, deep in her throat, a dreadful kind of a gloating laugh. Yet it was a sound that awakened something deep inside of a person, something primal and fearful—perhaps like that something a Negro feels when he's taking part in a voodoo ritual.

She took off the rest of her clothes, handed the soft scented garments to me one by one, and waited till I reached to take them from her hand. As I started hanging them on the nearby rack to hide my confusion at her frank nudity, she stood watching me, as if I were a child whose antics were bound to prove amusing. And the rows of smooth black bodies stood, endlessly repeated, like statues or corpses—the whole place was silent and empty except for ourselves. I was convinced they were all too scared of Fal to make a sound or move—and I wondered over and over just what they were afraid of and hoped I would ever find out.

She spoke at last, breaking that uncomfortable graveyard-like silence.

"I noticed in the garden, that you reacted rather violently to my presence. Your face flushed so prettily and your eyes betrayed many conflicting emotions. Tell me, what is it you feel when you look at me?"

I was trying every way *not* to look at her standing there, perfectly unconscious of her nudity—or brazenly proud of it—and she was asking me what I felt when I looked at her.

I didn't raise my eyes to hers, I couldn't. I mumbled—"I just thought you were very attractive, that's all."

Her voice sharpened and that feeling of peril ran over me again and again. She said: "Look at me when you speak! Look at my eyes. You know perfectly well you felt a great many reactions, some very interesting to me, who must always strive to understand you Earth people. I want you to explain . . . "

I looked at her, my face a bright embarrassed pink. She raised both hands and turned slowly in front of me, looking alternately at her reflection in the mirrors and at my scarlet face.

"Do you still find me attractive, without the aid of clothing?"

I mumbled, "Yes," and turned away to hang up the last bit of filmy feminine stuff.

"Then bring me a robe, or must I stand here like this forever?"

One of the "Blackies" sprang from the wall like a monkey on a spring,

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took a soft fluffy robe from a hanger and placed it in my hands. As I handed it to her, she placed one of her hands beneath my chin and tipped my face up to hers. She looked into my eyes, then sighed and made a remark that puzzled me for a long time.

"I think I will keep you as you are for a while. It will be fun, if nothing else. Don't cause any trouble, do you hear? I'd have to change you!"

She seemed to have forgotten her request for me to explain my reactions to her and left the room, presumably to take her bath. I sat down, and waited. It was like that, always waiting for the next day—a job as a museum guard must be like that. Only in this museum I was waiting for one of the statues to come in again, instead of watching to see that they didn't go out. In this museum the art objects were all from another world—as meaningless to me as lumps of coal, and the statues were all alive and all alike!

I learned nothing at first, and it was like being shut off from the world and placed in a cage—a cage visited only by my mistress. Then I learned there was another prisoner. I heard her cry out, and heard Fal's voice coldly replying; then the crack of a whip or a rod. The door that had been left open was closed, and the "Blackie" stood with his back to it, his unwinking eyes on me. I thought about that for a few days, eager to know who the scream had come from and what she was doing here.

In a way, my position was analogous to that of the rest of the people who had suddenly become shut off from normal communication with the rest of the world. Everyone went on living in his home, going to work—but the newspapers, the radios, every means of communication passed through such a rigid censorship that one never heard anything that was news. There were lots of wild rumors circulated by word of mouth—and no way to substantiate any of them. Each person in the U. S. A. was quite as much at the mercy of Fal's whims as I myself.

The others, the "Blackie" servants, were like so much furniture. After a time I disregarded them, and they certainly did the same to me. They never moved except for some specific duty.

I thought that Fal was playing cat and mouse with me, waiting day after day for my natural susceptibility to her to make me succumb to the daily sight of her, and then . . .

That's what worried me. I was afraid that I would say something, do something, for which she would punish me, and I had heard some of those wild rumors before my "promotion." Also Fal had made that enigmatic remark about not wanting to have to "change" me. I didn't want to find out what she meant.

After a while Fal took to sitting in her room, before she went to her bath, looking at me with her deep and wholly mysterious eyes. Often she said nothing at all, just watched the blood creep up my cheeks, and the pulsation of the veins start in my temples. Perhaps she was waiting for

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my strange Earthly mind to understand that she wanted love, or, on the contrary, waiting for an excuse to amuse herself by punishing me for not being as perfectly automatic and non-human as her "Blackie" servants? I tried my best not to have it either way.

Remember, I was only eighteen. There was a lot I didn't know about women, even if I did work in a hotel. There was a lot I didn't know about the world, and this woman was not of our world, but of some peculiar alien culture. Sometimes she'd say:

"You think me vary evil, vary bahd?"

Such queries always surprised me. She was *really* trying to find out what I thought, and she was as ready to believe me when I evaded with a lie as when I told the truth.

I'd stand, like the kid I was, with my mouth open, caught on the rapier of her attraction and held back by the fear of her that always rippled along my skin when she came near me.

I knelt and put on her sandals. I couldn't trust myself to talk.

"Is it Sallee, that little black-haired girl?"

I just looked at her, and she read the truth where I didn't know it myself.

"It is not Sallee, just childish reluctance. You are handsome boy. Do you fear me?"

She knew I did. She probably knew why too.

"You have never been lonesome. I am always lonesome. There is no one to admire me but these clods along the walls. They are not alive, they are not people, like you!"

"They're not alive?" I repeated in complete amazement.

She caught herself and started to talk rapidly in some confusion.

"Admire me, boy! Tell me, am I beautiful to you, or am I like one of those along the wall—just furniture to you?"

She often said that mockingly. "Admire me, tell me sweet things about my appearance, I need some admiration today . . . " Yet it was obvious the woman lived in need of plain every-day flattery. With those silent "Blackies" of hers always shutting out other people, it was no wonder.

She confided in me, at times, as if it did not matter what she said to me since I had no contact with my people. She told me, not in detail, but in a sketchy way—they had stolen the big ship in which they came and they still had a captive who had been aboard the ship and who was kept in Fal's chambers, because of her knowledge of things that must not be talked about. When she told me such confidences, her eyes would warn me that my position was rapidly becoming the same—I knew too much to be allowed to go free.

Such confidences always aroused in me thoughts of the future, day-dreams of my escaping from there and carrying with me the necessary information to free the U. S. A. from Fal's domination. Such day-dreams gradually crystallized into thoughts of her captive—a being from another

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world, who might hold the key to the "Blackies' " strength—might give me that key to unlock their hold on our world.

There came a day, in her talks with me, that began like many another, with that rather strange command of Fal's—"Admire me, am I beautiful?" I always answered such commands with mere flattering words, and she knew they were only words arising from obedience.

This day she required more:

"You say I am beautiful, but you do not make me feel that you mean it. If you tried very hard, couldn't you convince me of the sincerity of your admiration? Was I mistaken in you, our first meeting? You seemed to admire me then?"

"Of course you are beautiful, Queen Fal! You know I think that."

I tried to change the subject:

"How is it you speak English so well?"

"We spent over a year studying your language and your customs before our coup . . . " she replied absently. She was looking at her hands and I had no idea what was really on her mind, for there was always a misgiving about her. Then she went on:

"I have you here to talk to me, so that I might know your mind, yet you seem afraid to speak openly to me. I do not like that. It might be wise of you to please me better than you try to do. It would make me sad to have to change you—it always makes me sad when they are young . . . " her voice trailed off. She was looking backward over some vista of her memory. My mind refused the implications that were so numerous around me. Earth people have difficulty believing in horror when they are face to face with it. They think horror is something that happens only in fiction.

"Tell me about your world, about space, about your people and how they live," I said. "If I had more understanding of your former life perhaps I would be better able to talk to you. You see, your highness, you do not make it clear what you expect of me."

"I do not want to talk about my world! I want to forget it. Yours is a better place to live, that is why I wanted it and took it for my own. You can never understand that part of me. I had believed you were greatly attracted to me. Yet now that I show you every intimacy, you act as if I were an object of art. Or is it that you are so cowardly you fear for your life if you make improper advances?"

She laughed, that deep throaty purr that was so attractive and yet to me really frightening. Then she looked back down at her hands with an expression of frustration that was pitiful. I felt my first real emotion for this woman from another world—a genuine pity.

She spoke again: "I seek through space, after fleeing one particularly unpleasant life, and on your world I find a people who have something I have never had. You do not know what it is not to have it, and I hope I never have to teach you."

These were enigmatic words, be-

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yond me in their meaning. I knew it was the beginning of real slavery for me, if I let her get under my skin or get a grip on my emotions greater than she already had. I knew now that she wanted me to love her, a complete devouring passionate love.

Then she would always keep me dangling, like a desperately submissive toy. I did not want it. Yet I reached out a hand and touched her arm. It was the first time I had touched any of the "Blackies' " flesh. Her skin was very cold, and a shock of tingling cold electricity shot up my arm. It was a sensation so vastly different from what I expected to feel that I sprang to my feet. My mind was numb, and whirling with the attempt to understand how anything living in human form could feel like that!

Her eyes widened, then again became expressionless. "What did you feel, Earthman? Was it pleasant or unpleasant?"

I stammered, "Pleasant, yes! B-b-but not what I expected."

"I wish I could tell you why it is like that, but I cannot. I still cannot trust you. If you knew what I was, you might abhor me, might shrink from me as from a reptile. But I would like you to take me in your arms, and make an effort to tell me plainly what you experience. I must know, it is important!"

She rose then and came into my arms. That sensation of cold ecstasy, of something totally different from human experience, was overwhelming. A bitter-sweet unearthly flood of living force flowed from her to me. I closed my eyes and stood holding that unearthly wonder in my rigid arms. The hard roundness pressed to me was like ice, yet infinitely pleasant, after the first shock of strangeness. She had asked me so often to explain in detail my reactions to her that now, while my whole body throbbed with an ecstatic response to her, I tried. My voice was strange to me. It seemed to come from deep inside of me, my unconscious thoughts finding expression:

"When I first saw you, Queen Fal, I feared you as one fears death. I desired you as one desires the unattainable, knowing the desire but a foolish wish for Heaven on Earth. I thought you the most beautiful creature I had ever seen, and the most strange beauty I had ever admired. I desired you with a vast curiosity, and I feared you with a kind of revulsion, as one fears a corpse. I am not what is called an intelligent man. I am not smart enough to lie to you. I feared to love you, because I feared you wanted but a plaything. I do not want to be helplessly in love with something that despises me for a weak fool. I do not want to love you if you cannot respect me as an equal, Fal. Yet if this strange unearthly thing you offer me is lost to me, if I never hold you in my arms again —I will never stop desiring your body, I will never stop thinking of your cold, strange, mysterious beauty."

She held me at arm's length and that pitiful expression of frustration was slowly changing as her eyes gleamed with a cold fire of discovery

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and triumph.

"So there *is* a man inside of you who admires me, and who can tell me whether I live or am but a walking corpse, waiting for life. Sometime, my perceptive Earth-man, I will tell you what and who I am, and you will then know what a delight you bring to me. But it is still too soon."

Her voice had changed, from that of a cold mocking superiority, to a thrilling cadenced kind of chant, with strange meaning in the undertones. Her eyes had lost something cold and repellent, and gained something—she had a look as if I had given her diamonds instead of words. For me, there was still that feeling of peril from her.

Then she kissed me, a quick, soft touch of icy lips on mine. She touched my hair once with the tips of her long fingers, and left with that leaping swiftness of the "Blackies."

The wait, that day, seemed somehow a lot longer than the former days. I realized I was apt to be the most unhappy man on Earth if my former suspicions as to her real nature proved more correct than today's findings.

Just what my weird entanglement really would mean to my life was still beyond my powers of analysis.

Late that night, my fears of the consequences of prowling somewhat abated, I tried the big double door of the suite in which I had so far preferred to remain. I knew that it opened into the quarters which were sacrosanct to the Queen—but I also knew she had gone to an important conference in Washington—I had heard her give orders for the plane. Usually she did not return from such trips till the next day. I imagined the place would be empty, or if the "Blackies" were on duty they would ignore my presence as they always had.

What I wanted was to talk with that female captive I had heard scream one day. I wanted to reassure myself that my rather horrible deductions as to what really went on in some of these forbidden corridors and chambers were not true. I thought I could get the truth from her—the captive—perhaps escape before it was too late.

It was around two in the morning and the place was as quiet as ever. I had slipped on the regulation black tights and a pair of the "Blackie" pointed shoes—they were soft-soled and silent. I let myself into the chamber where I had heard the scream. The soft moonlight glow from the stuff from which the palace was built lighted everything—and I was taken aback by not finding the luxurious nest I had expected.

Instead, the place was a litter of queer mechanical gadgets, in partial dismemberment, obviously undergoing repairs or changes. It was a workshop—yet I knew it was the Queen's sleeping chamber. The Queen's real character hit me like a thunderbolt—I realized at once why she was the leader of the "Blackies." She was the one who knew the most about the mechanics of that mysterious ship in which they came. Some of her words had hinted that it was a stolen

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ship, in which they had fled from their own world.

Her bed was a hard cot, a kind of metal bunk, probably brought from the ship. There was little furniture, just work benches and tools and electrical litter. My impression of the Queen as a woman unlike other women was strengthened by the sight of the untidy litter and the Spartan sleeping quarters. I realized, too, that my presence formed the woman's only indulgence, perhaps her only departure from a long-time rigid self-discipline. Except for her frank disrobing and somewhat mocking exposure of her body to me, there had been nothing between us. And today there was but an embrace, and the opening words of a future courtship, whose strange and perilous nature I could sense, but could not predict or understand in any way.

I had to find that captive, as she was the one person who might be able to enlighten me as to the origin of Fal and the "Blackies." I meant to get any information I could wangle to the resistance I felt sure was forming somewhere in the States. In spite of any infatuation I might have formed for the Queen—I meant to try to do what every citizen wanted done—to help to return our country to its former way of life.

I found the captive, who was in a small room built into one end of the largest chamber in the wing. The door was solid, and there was only a small aperture into which I could peer by standing on my toes. There was a light switch beside the door which was unusual, as the "Blackies" needed only the soft luminescence from the stones they built into the place. I flicked on the light.

A small bundle in the corner came to life, turned over, and stood up. She couldn't have been more than five feet high and looked like an elf, only she had dark curly torrents of hair which rippled over her bare shoulders, and huge dark eyes. She had a small pointed chin, and a rather pathetic little mouth which was grimacing against the sudden brilliance. Her well developed woman's form betrayed she was no mere child. She wore a torn piece of bright yellow leather wrapped around her haphazardly and fastened with a piece of copper wire.

I was afraid she would cry out and give me away. I put my finger to my lips. I slipped the bolts and turned the big key in the lock. She sprang out the door with even more grace and strength than the "Blackies" showed—but paid no attention to me! She ran to the center of the chamber, and lifted a trap in the floor by a metal ring, very gradually, so as to make no sound, and peered down. I slid to a place beside her, and looked down too.

The chamber below was about the same size as the one we were in. There were about a dozen of the "Blackie" guards, tall slender pallid men, standing around a captive who stood between the poles of a tremendous horseshoe magnet. The arms of the magnet were wrapped with coil on coil of heavy wire. The man couldn't move far because his feet were fas-

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tened to the floor with metal clips. He wore a regulation U. S. Army officer's uniform.

He was a big man, young, that tall athletic type of American we like to think is typical of us.

"Go ahead," he was saying, "I can't tell you a thing about any organized resistance. If I knew I wouldn't anyway, so you're wasting your time."

The "Blackie" sitting at the control panel turned a dial, and sparks flashed between the poles, steadied into a double flame. Red fire from one pole, and blue from the other, crackled across the gap. One of the "Blackies" took the officer's arm, pushed it out till the hand went into the purple core of the double flame. The officer gave a cry, not of pain, but of a ghastly surprise. He wrenched loose, flung the "Blackie" half across the room, stood looking at what had been his hand.

It wasn't a hand any more. The peculiar current had caused a change of form. The hand had lengthened in the palm, shortened in the fingers, become a paw of ugly new flesh. Otherwise he seemed in no pain, but that hand was something a man would be vastly ashamed to exhibit.

The guard at the controls said:

"Now tell, or you get the life-changing current over your whole body and become a monster your mother wouldn't recognize!"

"If I knew what to tell you, I might at that. But I don't know. Do your damnedest, you fools, you are finished anyway. Your time is running out."

They leaned forward, at the man's words, looking like dancers in some weird ballet in their black tights. I had often heard the remark "the damned dancers" when they were not around, and I had a theory, since my talks with Fal, that they were actually a ballet corps, and she the "premier danseuse" who had seized some ship on which they were passengers. It must have been a tremendous planet, to have a thousand in one ballet corps, and their ease of locomotion told the same story of a huge and heavy planet. Perhaps they were slave dancers, I thought, who had escaped from slavery that way. The guess explained a lot of things about them.

A door opened and closed somewhere in the background. A woman's voice, a voice I could not mistake for anyone but Fal's, cried:

"What goes on here? I gave no orders for this examination!"

All the "Blackies'" heads turned toward her, in perfect unison, and each of them louted a little down on one knee. The one at the controls grew even more pallid, his face remained empty, the eyes grew wide with fear. But he said in English:

"The officer was overheard speaking to another about the coming revolution and we felt it wise to interrogate him at once in case there was a time element involved. He claims to know nothing, except that we are doomed—and to have used the phrase in mere involuntary irritation with our presence. Is that not correct, officer?"

The man turned to the Queen,

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sneering a little, and I felt a sudden dislike for him in spite of what I had seen and what I felt in sympathy. I did not want anyone sneering at Fal, I realized, amazed, and wondered what was happening to my loyalty. Fal spoke to him directly.

"I am sorry this has gone so far as it has. I have no intention of torturing innocent people. It is a mistake, perhaps. You can set my mind at rest by giving a full explanation. What did you mean by saying that we are doomed?"

The officer answered:

"You cannot treat Americans as a subject people; they will not accept any Queen or any King. They will fight for their former freedoms soon or late. When they fight, you will die and all the rest of your crew of dancers and servants will die. That is what I mean."

"So your coming revolution is just an emotional phantasm in your mind, your resentment of us, is that it?"

The officer nodded, but even from my position I could tell that that was not all. His face was a dead giveaway, and a thrill shot through me that perhaps some army groups had managed to plan a revolt that might upset the whole web of power the "Blackies" had woven so swiftly over our country and were weaving over the rest of the world.

Fal came quite close to the mutilated man, smiling her stage smile, the one that was not really there. She said:

"I did not want this evil done to you. Now that it has been done, you cannot be free again, for it would be resented. It would be wiser if you confessed what little you do know of this "coming revolt," for we expect it and will learn the facts anyway. It would be wiser if you became one of us. Suitable compensation can be arranged."

Quite suddenly the officer swung that weird stump of his hand right into her face. She fell to one knee, and caught herself on one supple arm. She was upright in an instant, the mark of the blow a scarlet flame across the white face. Her lips snarled back over the perfect teeth.

Then she composed herself, and stepped back. She nodded to the expressionless guard at the controls. He turned the dial in his right hand, and at another nod from her began to turn a second dial. The first caused the two streams of pale blue and red fire to arc into the purple core just in front of the officer. He strained back but his feet were immovably fastened. The purple core grew, second by second, until it was a good six feet in diameter. Then it moved, a gradual creeping motion, until it touched his breast. Fal held up her hand, and the motion stopped.

"Speak, and your offense will be forgiven. I have no wish to do this thing. I regret that the current was brought into use. Believe me, we must protect ourselves, for there is much more at stake in this effort of ours than any one world. You cannot understand our motivations. Our reasons for taking over your world are not known to you. There are causes at stake much bigger and finer than your country's liberty. Speak, and

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trust me not to cause evil with your information. We must protect ourselves!"

Whatever she was trying to tell him, I don't know, but he did not get it. He struck back at her the only way he could . . . he spat at her. She flung up her hand to ward off the spittle and the "Blackie" took it for a signal to proceed. The purple core of crackling force sprang forward, engulfed him.

Fal cried out in an anguished voice: "No, no, I meant only to frighten him. This must not be . . . "

But it was too late. The officer screamed again and again, not as if in pain, but as if from a terrible fear, a nervous shock as if all his nerves were writhing in horror. His figure became indistinct and seemed to melt and soften like butter. As the flame receded I gagged. His features had become one mass of weirdly corrugated flesh, his uniform seemed to have lost all buttons and fasteners, began to slip slowly down from the shoulders that were now a weirdly sloping beast's.

As the thing that had been a man turned and strove against the foot fastenings, the clothing slipped entirely from him. He stood there, shuddering all over, a pillar of warped flesh. Arms that were stubs of horror waved impotent shocked resentment —or was it just a dying thing's unmeaning motion? Could the changed brain inside that horror still function?

The body resembled a huge embryonic form, entirely changed in every part from human resemblance. The face was non-existent, eyes were only holes in snouted corrugated flesh. I retched again, and the girl beside me lowered the trap silently.

"You speak English?" I asked the girl in a whisper.

She whispered back: "Yes, I studied your tongue for a long time. I helped Fal to study. She does not learn languages as readily as I. Poor Fal, she cannot keep all the Egerts in line."

She lifted the trap again, took a look down, and I snuggled up beside her to see too. They had brought in another officer, a tall slender fellow. He was quite strong and gave them a tussle as they brought him before Fal. He took a look at the mutilated thing still standing there with the uniform piled about it on the floor. His face changed from mild acceptance of necessary unpleasantness to a complete realization of horror. Fal gave him her frosty smile, asked:

"You want to become like your friend, here? Or do you want to discuss military matters nicely?"

The man retched, just as I had done. It was enough to make anyone sick. Then he gritted his teeth audibly, held himself erect, and his face became suffused with angry blood. Surprisingly, he seemed to decide to give information. I deduced that if Fal acted on anything he told her, she would be sorry.

"I'll talk," he said. "I don't want that to happen to me."

Fal quit smiling. I knew she had made the same deduction I had.

"Where is the center of this so-called rebellion you army malcon-

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tents are planning?"

"In Alaska."

Fal leaned forward, and each "Blackie" imitated her motion. "You have been there?" she asked.

"I just came from there."

"What are the numbers of your people under arms?"

"I don't know exactly. No one does but a few generals."

"When do they plan to attack?"

"I don't know that either. They are waiting for certain information, some of which I was sent to get. I know very little with certainty, as they expected that I might fall into your hands and I was allowed to learn very little."

Fal's voice was more chill than usual. "You are hardly talking, my friend. You sound more evasive than cooperative. Why did you come south? For what kind of information?"

"To learn what I could about your weapons, their nature, your numbers and probable effectiveness against an enemy force in the air. On the ground, we do not worry much; we know we can handle you."

"Oh, you know that." Fal smiled again. I did not remember having seen her so interested in anything before. "But you know nothing important except the nature of your own mission!" She quit smiling.

"Give me the name, location and description of your contact and any others you know."

"I have no contact, I work alone."

"Why are you in uniform?"

"According to military practice, a man in uniform is not a spy, and cannot be shot as a spy. Moreover, your agents would be less apt to suspect the uniform than the civilian."

Fal picked up a standard .45 caliber army revolver from the table. "Is this your weapon?" she asked him.

The man nodded. "I suppose it is. It is just an ordinary service revolver."

"I think I will recruit you into my forces."

The man only stared at her, not comprehending. Her voice was neither cruel nor threatening, but cold and detached. She pointed the gun at his head and pulled the trigger. For an instant after the report, the man stood there, a hole just above the hairline of his forehead. Then he toppled backward.

Two of the "Blackies" sprang forward and caught him before he hit the floor. Precision, always, as if it was something they had rehearsed for years. They didn't ask what to do with him. They stripped off his clothes, slid the body into a tank. Fal stood watching them idly, thinking of something else. It was plain she had seen this scene a thousand and one times. One of them pulled a switch in the wall. I saw it had been built in when the place was constructed. The tank was a part of the wall concrete—the whole thing had been planned from the start of the palace.

The body lay in the milky-transparent fluid. It began to move in little ripples of muscular contraction, rhythmic pulsations that grew until

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the whole body was moving rapidly and strongly. This went on for minutes. I watched the body with the meaning of the scene slowly sinking in to me, but not yet fully understood.

They opened the switch, took the dripping body out, stood it on its feet. It had not changed in contour or appearance greatly, yet it was not the same man. It was a new body, the coloring all different, the tans changed into silvery shadows, the pink into milk-white luminescence. The shocked, angry contorted face had relaxed, was placid and empty. The eyes were open and staring, and when they took their hands from it the thing took a step, steadied itself, remained standing alone! It was alive again! Yet I had just seen Fal murder that man with his own gun! Fal spoke to it rather absently—as if a routine that she went through from habit.

"Walk to the end of the chamber and return!"

The corpse walked. It did exactly as Fal told it to do! The awful truth of what the "Blackies" were sank into me. Now I knew where so many had come from. There had been only hundreds on the ship, and Fal had made more and more every day—out of dead Americans!

The girl beside me let down the trapdoor, and I whispered: "Are all the "Blackies" made that same way? Is Fal the only one alive?"

She looked at me, there in that perpetual moonlight of the "Palace of Darkness," with something very sad and pitying in her eyes.

"I'll explain everything to you at our next meeting. We have no time; Fal will come up here now. I must return at once to my cell, and you to your place. Don't let the Queen know what you have seen, nor betray yourself with even one twitch of a muscle—she is very sharp. Come to me again the very next opportunity and we will talk at length, and decide if there is anything we can do to remedy this evil . . . "

Exhibiting that same swift precision of movement with far more grace and an untheatrical, natural fluidity which the "Blackies" and their Queen did not have, she bounded back into her cage and I bolted the door and turned the key. I moved now swiftly myself, back to my own door and let myself in among the rows of hanging garments.

I was just in time, too. Queen Fal came in directly behind me and glanced suspiciously at my face, as if she had noticed something. You would have thought she was psychic and knew what I had seen. Then she relaxed, sank upon the divan. I unlaced the half-boots of openwork leather she wore. She touched the purpling mark on her face with tentative fingertips, her eyes on mine as she did so. I was still full of horror at what had been done to the two officers, felt all the resentment of a crushed, mutilated race of people.

She had always expected me to stand there while she removed her clothes, and I knew by now that she relished deeply my youthful admiration for her perfect body. I had al-

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most forgotten that our last meeting together had been in the nature of a love scene, and that Fal would from now on expect far more of me than mere oral admiration or eye adulation. Her eyes on my face were hungry, the lips parted, her hands fluttered the least bit. My whole inner being was shuddering with revulsion toward her and everything she stood for—but I had to pretend. I smiled at Fal, said:

"Your highness, I feel far differently toward you than I did before. Everything has changed!"

I meant to keep on with the act, and my words actually meant the reverse of what she took them to mean. She rose, placed her hands on my shoulders, moved close to me. My arms automatically went around her, that strange cold vitality in her ran through me like a breath off the fields of Lethe. That feeling of treading the brink of a precipice returned a thousandfold, now that I knew exactly what she had meant by her remark, "It would make me sad to have to change you. It always makes me sad when they are young!" I knew now what she had meant. I wondered how many thousands of young Americans had been "changed" by the "Blackies" since their arrival. She bent her head for a kiss . . .

The "Blackie" bounded in through the door with one of those effortless floating leaps that Earth's ballet dancers try so hard to achieve. He paused there before the Queen and myself, standing on his toes, his lips making a theatrical mouth—a round O of astonishment and alarm. His hand held out a tiny roll of film, and I saw that this roll of film and not my presence was the cause of his mime's expression. I deduced it had been found in the dead officer's clothing.

She came out of her relaxed stance just as impossibly sudden as a dancer might, in one of those less natural ballets, leaping ten feet and landing on her feet in a turn and glide, then out through the door on the second bound. I knew our gravity was a lot less than their world, but even so, that was no explanation of the weird quality of trained ballet about them all.

The "Blackie" bounded after Fal, still holding his tiny roll of film at arm's length, the arm following as precisely in the path of Fal's leaping exit as he followed the arm.

I picked up the robe Fal had been about to wrap around her, and followed on a run after them. It was a good enough excuse to try to see what was on that strip of film to cause the genuine alarm on that "Blackie's" usually blank face.

When I came into her chambers, they were both already intent upon the wall projection of the film. The room was otherwise almost dark, and I stood there, afraid to breathe, and watched the bright picture on the wall.

At first it was only a flat waste of snow, and in the distance the rocky sides of some tremendous mountain range. But then, in the center of the field of snow I saw there was a round hemisphere of blackness. This igloo of blackness grew larger, then it

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shrank quite as swiftly. It disappeared entirely, and from underneath it, now in plain sight, moved the familiar figures of U. S. Army doughboys. Tanks started up, huge skid loads of mechanical equipment began to move across the icy plain. Then the scene blanked out, and a series of printed words flashed across the screen.

"The film proves we have the secret of the invaders' control of light. What else they may have to throw at us we can only guess, but we are moving in on the eighteenth to put this Queen Foul to the test." A well known general's face appeared for an instant, smiled confidently, and then the printed words replaced his face: "Whoever is not with us is against us!"

I almost gave a rousing cheer, forgetting where I was and what I would become. I knew what the film meant, and so did Fal. It was an invitation to arise, from some group of Army forces, I guessed in Alaska, to some other group. Perhaps such a film had been sent to each and every Army post in the country. I knew Fal could not stop a movement like that, once under way, with any benevolent or syrupy words. Only complete and devastating defeat was going to stop those boys.

The projector light went out, and the three of us stood there in what was to me almost total darkness. I tried to ease out the door silently, but my leg struck something and Fal turned and saw me. She sprang across the room in one bound and snatched the robe from my hands angrily.

"Are you spying on me, my little innocent? Are you so foolish as to incur my wrath? Are you an imbecile?"

I mumbled: "I only brought your robe, your highness."

A sudden pad of feet behind me and a flood of that sense of peril made me turn. The "Blackie" who had brought the film had slipped behind me, stood there with a long thin sliver of shining steel in his hand. I don't know whether Fal nodded or whether he did it on his own. As I moved back he leaped. The steel went into me with a fierce pang of wrenching pain. I felt the flood of hot blood pouring into my lungs and sank slowly to my knees, staring up at Fal in what I suppose was an expression of utter accusation, of disgust and revulsion. Then the darkness swept down upon me, and I knew no more.

My first awakening sense was the nerves of my fingers, they told of rushing liquids and of many tingling variations of powerful electricity flowing over them. My next was an interior feeling of vast cold, of detachment, of inertia, of a waiting for some motivation to drive me into action. There was no reason to move, it had not occurred to me. I waited for life to begin.

Then came light, from above, and I looked up through colorless but stinging liquid. My face and arms were alive with stinging prickles of new sensation, but my eyes were telling my mind that the world had changed—and that everything in it

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looked very different. I watched while a tiny hand reached with a pole and a hook slipped under my neck, lifted my head. My eyes were quite close to the face of someone I knew. It was the Queen's female captive, doing things to my inert body! That little figure from another world was plying my tank with chained lightning, was adjusting pumps which drove the stinging fluids against my flesh in torrents. From the weary set of her face, she had been working over me for hours.

I sat up, now, without more assistance from the hook she had used to lift my head and peer into my face. A relieved expression replaced the evident anxiety on hers. She said: "Get out. I can't do any more for you, I guess."

At her command a joyous wish to obey went through me like a bolt of penetrating light. I floundered and clambered out of the liquid, found myself standing before her with no further ability to move a muscle. I just stood, while she waited, frowning.

"Walk."

I walked, that same strange wish to obey going through me at her words. I walked, clumsily, slowly, but with new strength coming swiftly into my limbs, a sureness into my step. As I came to the wall, I stopped, and an inertia snapped back into place like a sudden weight, holding me motionless facing the wall. The voice of my benefactor gave a wail, "Oh, plague take the error-filled mind of man! Return to me!"

I wheeled, marched back, and each step was a slow bubbling of the joy of obedience inside me.

She stood with her head cocked on one side, her eyes anxious and sorrowful on mine. Then she said:

"The Queen had no time to revive you herself. She ordered me to tell you your death was a mistake she did not wish to happen, but that she released me to tend to the change for you. I have done so, and you are now a full fledged servant of the Queen, and I pity you with all my heart. Can you say anything, friend? Do you recall anything of life? Please try very hard. Your memories will slip away into nothing unless you make every effort to retain them now when they are fresh. Death is no joke to put aside—and you are not really alive. There is so much to learn about these processes, and this one of Egert's is but experimental."

What she said penetrated to my memory, registered there in great clarity, but went no further. There was no impulse to respond, to express an opinion or an emotion. There was no emotion to express, really. I stood, waiting for I knew not what, or cared. The girl from another world stood watching with a sad curiosity, and went on talking. I paid strict attention, waiting for a command, for something that would make me move and serve.

"Fal went off in a rush after your death. I didn't know she could care for anything, but she seemed to be on the point of collapse because of what happened to you. She had given orders that no one was to enter her quarters except that particular serv-

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ant—and he was but obeying her past orders when he slipped the knife into you. It is very interesting that you managed to arouse a real emotion in the Queen. She was always one of Egert's most recalcitrant subjects, and when she went off control and on her own, no one was less surprised than I. I had warned my superior."

The girl handed me a towel, and I dried my body. She selected a suit of the regulation black from a large stack of clothing. I slipped it on.

"I suppose I had better get back into my cell, or the Queen will be angry with me; but I can't leave you to go through the ordinary routine. There are signs that your case will be different than the usual corpse, which has been through several stages of dissolution, usually, before immersion and regeneration. In your case I was able to get you into the tank within minutes. You should prove a more superior product of the process than is usually the case. On the chance that you will remember and understand, will you nod your head if you are able to think at all? Will you make an effort to be human, even though you never can be again? Try to summon at least a semblance of human type reaction from what has passed away. Do you understand?"

A sluggish movement of what seemed anger struggled inside me somewhere. I found my hand clenching into a fist very slowly. My hand came up before my face in a clenched fist. I looked at it. My head turned slowly, back to the girl. A look of puzzlement came on her face.

"I do hope," she muttered to herself, "you are not going to be a reject after all. The clenched fist could mean anything! Please do not show anger if you have it. Those automatons will call you *reject* unless you act only upon orders. That is one thing I hold against Fal, she does not comprehend the process is still in experimental stages and will produce something fine only when it has developed.

"But come, I will return to my cell, and you will lock the door for me so that Fal will not be displeased. Ah me, if only I had not lost control of the Queen; all this tragedy would never have occurred . . . "

She moved off, her tiny graceful figure a poem of motion. I followed clumsily, my feet taking too-long steps, my balance hard to retain. In the upper chambers she re-entered her cell. I closed the door and turned the key. She stood just inside her prison, peering up through the opening, and I stood close to the door and looked down at her sweet pointed face. There was a pain in my breast, but I did not think it was from the knife that had killed me. It was a pain that meant I had not managed to do what this little woman wanted me to do, since . . . since . . . My mind stopped, and I waited, motionless, leering down at a small face with tears in its eyes.

"Very interesting," she kept saying, as if by repetition to make me talk and react naturally. "Most interesting. You just stand there with your world undergoing the most terrific changes—knowing now what the

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word *change* can mean! Please awake. Prove me right, and Egert wrong about the nature of recharged flesh! Please! If only you would be, out of all the trials and error, the one successful human . . . but I know better! The process can only produce the *form* of life—can't reconstitute the original intricate conditions which produced human life as we know it. What we have is something else, something no human mind can ever accept as alive—yet it is quite as much life as any other form of life. It must be, cannot be otherwise! Yet is it so different from life. Your world is poised on the brink of a *death* struggle—and I stand here and fail to take the proper side because I once loved Fal—even though she was a criminal type—and love her still, in spite of all. But, poor young animal of a man, the most interesting thing of all is that Fal, who to my knowledge never loved anyone but herself, is in love with you! She loved you, and her own slave-creature killed you before her eyes! Only Dan, the great God of this circuit, could predict what that has done to poor Fal's abused and mutilated ego. She could have been so much, on Nyr, if her life had flowed in different channels. Still I stand in indecision—

"Am I too an Egert Robot? Am I becoming as you, merely from handling the ingredients of living death so long? Must I pass up my first opportunity to escape because I am by nature a thinker and not a doer. Listen, you poor murdered creature, can you drive? One of your autos-you-call-them?"

My head moved in an exaggerated nod, and my blood leaped in an eager wish to be of service.

"Unlock my door, then, and from henceforth remember you are my slave, and *not* the Queen's! You hear!"

Again my head nodded with obedience. My hands moved as if with her will to unbolt and unlock her prison door.

She moved out, not with the swift motions of before, but with indecision seeming to clog her steps. She left the chamber, and I plodded directly in her footsteps. She moved into the Queen's wardrobe, and stood there, undoing the peculiar attire of makeshift leather she wore. She moved, a naked and beautiful elfin figure, among the thousand garments of the Queen's wardrobe, selecting at last a simple gray set of the Queen's tights. She had to pull them up to her chin to make them fit. She threw on a loose coat of rough wool, and moved off, I following. Down the wide ornate stairs of carved white marble, through the gardens of vast and weird plants, under the black dome of darkness we moved. Out the great gateway of glowing black stone blocks, carved over with the strange art of another planet, and along the sunken pathway of smooth glowing blackness toward the distant motor court where the service cars of the palace stood in waiting ranks. We passed dozens of the black-clothed motionless creatures, but their eyes, after seeing me, one of their kind, passed on over the tiny, lovely elf beside me without notice or alarm.

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She entered a convertible of brilliant red hue. I clambered behind the wheel. My hands knew what to do, and I set the car in motion down the pale strip of concrete that moved straight as a string across the golden desert. Overhead the darkness paled; we were getting beyond the area of darkness which surrounds Queen Fal's palace.

Something moved inside my strangely numb mind—and my lips moved. Over and over I tried to say the words, to see what they were, and at last speech came forth. A great delight spread over the girl's face as I said:

"Where is my Queen?"

"She will probably be where we are going. We will try to find the center of resistance to the Queen. There I mean to explain the nature of this thing and give them the key to unlock the grip Fal has upon them. She has demonstrated she cannot ride the monster that Egert created any better than he could himself. She has shown that what was supposed to be a simple and obedient robot is instead unpredictable and entirely misunderstood by Egert when he created it out of dead flesh. I, as Egert's only representative on this world, must do what he would do, and undo the harm his creation is doing."

I nodded, just as if I understood her, which I did not. I only knew that her words were written on my mind in bright letters of flame, that they sounded beautiful. Some day, I felt, I would go over the bright words and extract all the wonderful juice of meaning in them.

"How do you feel now?" she asked, and I nodded again, so that she would ask me something else.

She sighed, disappointed at my nod. I tried then to make good sounds for her the way she did for me, of friendship and elation and courage and fine white fire. I mumbled slowly, my tongue thick as a felt rug in my mouth. I mumbled:

I am your Egert, my robot is you. There are good hearing in your moving lips, my eyes want to sweep on you . . . "

She clapped her tiny hands. The car moved along the road with a high hum of rubber on concrete, and that was very good to hear. The wind was cold on my face, and the moon rode overhead, peering down with a strange yellow face. I liked the moon and drove on under it fast. I mumbled, and my tongue stuck to my lips, lolling out wet on my chin. I started over, with the thickness like a bad taste.

"The moon is over and yellow. You are bright, and gold is afire in you, something good burns and says, 'you are people.' I am not people, I am you. You said it, and it must be. I wait, you tell, I move. I am your more."

Her eyes were wet with tears dropping sweetly, drop by drop, from her long lashes onto her soft cheeks. Her lips trembled with strange emotion, and she leaned forward to watch my face. My eyes did not want to be on the road, but on her face, but I could not turn them.

"You are my one who talks, and

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I will make you more than ever any dead man ever was before! Drive on, and say whatever your dead mind still can say."

"The night, night, night—" I said, and nodded. "N-night goes past, and the moon goes behind, the road is under, and the north is facing us. Where is my Queen Fal? I want the cold goodness that comes from her. I want to taste the strange death on her lips—where is Fal?"

"You may find her too soon, my pet," she answered. "And what she is in truth you may know better than I who have studied and hated and loved her for many years. Drive on, and Fate decide what becomes of Fal and You and all the other dead. And when I die, I hope I may be as strangely deceased as yourself. The Egert who talks the first day is indeed a good piece of revitalizing. May Dan send you the answer to Egert's problem!"

I went on talking as she had commanded. The night wore away, and the car went on under my hands. A plane flew over, and then came back, with fire spitting down at us. I whirled the wheel. We shot across the sand and the car spun end for end and stopped in the shadow of a vast thicket of tall cactus. I sat. The plane circled, came to earth a short distance away. A man got out, and in his hand was a deadly grenade. The living elf beside me shouted in a high soprano.

"Do not throw that grenade, soldier, we are friends in spite of the black disguise. We bear news for the world you fight for!"

I clambered out, but the she-elf whispered: "Stand, do nothing, or you will be not only dead but shattered, and me too!"

I stood. My head kept turning back and forth, waiting to be shattered as she said. It did not happen. I said:

"The sun pushes against the blackness, and the day comes now. You shout in a song I like. Are your lips cold as Fal's? That is the question for your corpse. Kiss me."

She laughed in a high excited ripple. "I gave you too much charge, you idiot. I don't believe you were dead, you are drunk as an owl instead."

"I am dead as a stuffed owl, and the night is past, your hair shines with sun, and the airman comes with mail."

The pilot had approached, and stood with his mouth open looking at me and the elf. I moved no muscle: she had said "Stand." The pilot scratched his head.

"Give with the info, Snow White. What is this 'Blackie' doing; abducting you?"

"He is not what you think. But take us to your headquarters. I can give the key to Queen Fal's death. It will remain for your leaders to use it, if they have the wits in their heads."

The pilot still stood, watching both of us, and the grenade still in his hand. He hung the grenade on his belt, pulled out a pistol.

"You talk like a book, and he acts like a stiff. What gives, anyway?"

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I said: "Brother of the night, you have well."

The Elf began to giggle, and sank to the running board, crossing her little legs and relaxing tiredly. "If you want my history, airman of this benighted planet, I was an assistant to a famous bio-physicist of the planet called Nyr, of the Federated Planets of the Baldachian group. My name is Deerwin. Eena for short. I learned English by order of Fal, who was once my personal robot but is now my captor. Shall I go on . . . ?"

The airman leaned against the fender, holding his gun ready in his hand. He curled a sarcastic lip, and swore. "Damn it, lady, I am only a pilot, not a character in a Buck Rogers comic. Tell me you are normal citizens who put on the 'Blackie' silk pants to escape their patrols—tell me the moon is green cheese—tell me anything but that you come from Nyr, the Dog Star. I don't believe that stuff."

I nodded. I said: "My elf from Nyr tells truth. I am her's, and I know!"

He turned away, muttering. "A couple of whacks from the bughouse. I should take them in and get kidded for the rest of my life? Not me! Drive on, Napoleon."

As he plodded off, Eena Deerwin, my elf, called after him in that canary soprano of hers:

"Next time we will get arrested by a gentleman, not a thick-head like you. Go on and fly away, Fal is going to wipe you all out without me, anyway, what does it matter? Where do you think your good Queen Fal came from, anyway?"

He turned back, his face still filled with a frustrated expression of disdain.

"Just where *does* that black witch come from, then."

Eena Deerwin stood up to all of her four feet and a full inch, and shrilled out in exasperation. "From Nyr, and she never would have gotten away if . . . never mind! How could you understand that things are not as you are used to having them, on another world? How could a mere Earthman understand there are other worlds, to begin with. Even with Fal riding your country to its death!"

"Look honey, *prove* this to me. My worries are just to avoid the unpleasant riding I'll get if you are a couple of whacks. I'll admit anything can be true in this crazy world, but let's sit down here and spend a few minutes explaining things. I'll never hear the story after you get to headquarters."

He squatted in the sand, and lit a cigarette. "Say on, comrades. I will give you a lift if you make it interesting. But that is one swell Cadillac convertible to leave sitting in the desert."

Eena sat down again, and I stood motionless, as Eena had commanded. The desert was covered with long dark shadows and bright dunes under the rising sun, and here and there a mouse scurried, out to get the insects. A bird trilled somewhere in the sage, and the world smelled good.

"I used to work for a citizen of our world named Egert. He evolved a

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method or reviving corpses not too long dead, but the doctors refused to make use of his methods because the revived man or woman was never the same mentally—never what you would call human. He decided that he could adjust his process to produce the perfect robot, a being who only moved upon command, and never did anything that he was not commanded to do. He succeeded, and the product was called the Egert robot."

The airman flicked his cigarette ash with one finger, nodded his head, his eyes narrow on the elf's pointed face. She was very sweet and soft and small in the morning sun.

"But people were afraid of them. He could get no commercial backing because they could not be sold. To popularize them, he formed a ballet group out of his experimental robots. They were trained by the very best dancers of our country and they became, after a time, very popular. They have a faculty for unified, selfless activity, which is no accident but the successful result of a lot of hard work and research in attempts to produce a standard working robot that could be trusted with any simple task requiring little thought. These robots were designedly inferior mentally because of the populace's fear of a superior creature who was not human—but a corpse. They danced, perfectly, beautifully, and they became popular, were displayed in every large theatre because everyone wanted to see the dancing corpses as a curiosity. Morbid, perhaps, but Egert's plan was good and the willing, selfless slave was a goal worth working for."

The pilot smiled. "I think I get it, gal. Those were the original 'Blackies'!"

"You must remember there is a great deal about them that is not understood even by Egert himself. They show in every way that they are a new form of life, not with the same characteristics of humanity, but a different kind of life. This was not understood at first. We found out the hard way that they did not remain obedient and selfless, but became by natural process of growth a different type of human life."

The airman looked a question. "So . . . ?" he said.

"So the premier ballerina, Queen Fal, got ideas of her own. This was partly my fault. She was one of the first products, a very successful revivification whom I had used for a personal servant until the ballet corps was formed. On a trip to one of the two moons of Nyr, she led her 'Blackies' in a mutiny, took the ship and marooned the crew on life rafts. Then she set out to seek something she called 'beauty and what is meant for me by nature'." The pilot looked up at me.

"So she's a screwball like this one standing here?"

"He is not a screwball; he is an Egert robot! They think in a different pattern, talk in a different way. They are, each one, a little different from each other, just as are humans, but in the mass they are a new form of life. Something the currents and injections and immersion fluids do to them in the process changes the

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brain cells, gives them a new set of reactions. This man, who was murdered by Fal's servant, is even now wishing for her lips . . . because her lips were cold as death! But yesterday he was a man like yourself."

"What's it all add up to? Fal is doing us no good as a ruler, the country is going to pot—and the army is all set to mop up on the 'Blackies' for good."

"And your army," shrilled Eena at the pilot, "will fail because they don't know what they are up against in Fal's ship from Nyr. Nyr is a monster planet, and the ship is built by an engineer's guild whose records go back ten thousand years building space ships. What would you do against that kind of machine building —that type of weapons? The idea is folly of the most childish kind. You must capture Queen Fal by playing on her weaknesses and by understanding the Egert brain and taking advantage of its strange qualities. Only I can help your leaders do this. Together we shall trap her, free your people, and send her packing. Without me, your people go to their deaths and my dear blundering Egerts will become monsters because of their youth. Their minds are only a few years old. They *begin* when revitalized, their past is remembered, but as we remember something we have read. They are really children with vast potentialities for good or evil—and Fal has led them into a situation that can only result in evil for all of you as well as the Egerts. You must help me, for your people's sake!"

He stood up, offered Eena his hand to arise. They stood there, sweet elf and the tall birdman, and my breast had a pain in it because she looked up to his face with such sweet regard.

"Let's go, little woman. I'm convinced. Shall we take our zombie here, or leave him to his convertible?"

"Take him. I can use him to demonstrate the truth of what I have to explain."

It was nearly noon when the plane landed in a waste of snow. It was the same scene of rugged mountains and flat ice-laden plain I had seen in the film which had caused my change.

There was little evidence of life when we landed, other than a few tracks in the snow. But men came pouring from camouflaged underground openings, whisked our plane out of sight into an underground hanger. We were somewhere in Alaska, with the enemies of Queen Fal. I felt very sorry for her, and I knew Eena Deerwin did too.

My elf was very weary when she came to the quarters they gave me, some days later. She dropped on my cot, and said: "What you call thickheads, yes, they have some!"

After that she began to snore gently, and I stood motionless beside her, so as not to awaken her. She was a very beautiful little thing, asleep, like a doll. I wondered what errand brought her to me, and hoped she would waken and tell me soon. I wanted to serve her.

Then the lights began to flicker, on and off, more and more rapidly. Still she slept, until a siren outside

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began to scream so it hurt my head. She awoke and put her hands to her ears, saw the light flickering so maddeningly. She screamed out: "Fal has found this place and is attacking!"

An officer came noisily into my room. "All personnel ordered into the deep shelters. On the double!"

Then he stood there, having seen me standing motionless and the bright faced elf beside me, her eyes full of alarm, still wearing the queen's ill-fitting clothes. It hung on her little figure comically. He stood there with his mouth open in surprise, then he mumbled:

"A 'Blackie' and a girl 'Blackie.' I'll be damned, I didn't know we had taken any prisoners." Then he went out and locked the door so we couldn't get out.

Eena shrilled after him: "We came here of our own accord and we are not prisoners; open that door!"

But he had run off down the corridor and we were left behind. Outside somewhere began a terrible thunder and hissing, and heat came pouring down the corridor from the plain outside. Eena shook the door with two tiny hands. I put my shoulder against it, and the latch tore off. We went out.

We ran down the tunnel. After a time we came to a concrete highway, along which poured a steady line of army trucks, jeeps, tanks and other vehicles. The highway went on and on under the mountain. All about were stalactites and stalagmites glittering in the yellow light. It was a natural cavern which the army had made into a shelter.

A jeep stopped beside us. In it were three flying officers. One of them was our friend who had brought us here. He shouted at us:

"Well, if it ain't the elf and the zombie! Climb aboard. Your Queen is blasting hell out of upstairs!"

Eena shrilled back at him: "Your army is not so thick-headed as I thought! You have a whole mountain over your head, here. Let Fal try to burn it down!"

I said: "Queen Fal will change everybody. She is angry."

One of them shouted above the sound of the many motors and wheels, which reverberated in the big cavern deafeningly. "She changed the whole damn plain outside, sailing across with a dozen heat rays burning down. And all she got was a half-dozen anti-aircraft emplacements. She'll have to do better than that!"

The pilot whom we knew, whose name was Ernie Peters, put his arm around Eena so she would not fall out of the jeep. I did not think she would fall and took his arm down again. He looked at me and Eena put her hand on his arm. After that nobody said anything. Eena wiped her eyes. I felt sad and alone. I was not a friend.

Next day a lot of solemn old officers sat behind a table and made Eena answer questions. I stood behind her, not moving, but I remembered everything.

"Now that we have seen Fal's ship in action," the man with the purple nose was saying to Eena, "we have decided that it would be better to

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listen to you than to try to overcome her by force. Now explain just what we are to do . . . "

Eena took me by the hand, and made me stand in front of the table where everyone looked at me curiously. Then she talked.

"We of Nyr have always frowned on the various processes of bringing back the dead to life. It has been long possible, but there were too many complications and the product was always inhuman. The synthesized revitalizing fluids must of necessity contain drugs of a powerful nature to cause a spurt of activity in the healing processes and the growth rate—a temporary spurt. The electric charges used to induce reanimation also introduce a series of reactions not present in life. The new life begins anew, even though it is equipped with its old memory. It is a new life because the necessary stimulation is produced by reagents not found when the life grows normally. That is, the basic cell goes through a short period of violent stimulation to new healing growth which changes the basic brain cell into another type of cell. This fact could never be overcome because of some slight lack of knowledge of how life came into existence in the first place."

The row of solemn faces behind the table top all nodded, so I nodded too.

Little Eena went on, her voice like one reading a dictionary. I bent my head to her, making sure to remember everything so I could think about it when thinking came back to me.

"My teacher, a man named Egert, evolved a process of revivification which produced a creature of humble obedience and little else of an individuality. He called the creature the 'Egert Robot' because it had so little quality of self and so large a quality of service. On our world the various facets of human character are recognized as products of gland secretions."

One of the medical officers behind the desk nodded, said: "We have some slight understanding of that fact."

"In the case of Fal, some variation produced a creature whose quality of vanity exceeded her will-to-obey. This was not realized until too late. We learned that a vain robot is an ambitious robot."

One of the solemn faces behind the board cleared its throat and bellowed ponderously:

"It seems to me a vile practice to make zombies out of your dead!"

Little Eena smiled, trilled back:

"The practice never got beyond the experimental stage. On Nyr, we do not allow prejudice or superstition to discourage experimental research!"

The man with the purple nose clapped his hands together, whispered: "That'll hold you, Enoch!"

Another officer stood up, came around the table, tipped my head back and looked into my eyes. He said, "Open your mouth!" I opened my mouth and he looked into it.

Eena stood beside him. "The revived animal is not a human animal. It is a variation. The blood is different, the coloring, the metabolism is

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not even understood properly."

"I grant you that!" the man said, and went back and sat down.

Eena pushed me back of her, and her voice rose and became almost commanding.

"We have no time in the present emergency to go into the intricate complexities of bio-physics. You must trust my knowledge of these creatures and my intimate study of Queen Fal to dictate to you a course of action. Now listen, and if you love your people, follow my instructions, or she will inevitably triumph. She has a completely logical brain, but her thought processes and her goals are not what you can understand or cope with in any way. Her basic motivation is vanity. To be admired is her greatest pleasure. You must call a public parley— No secret confabs of a few envoys will please her—and she will bite on a chance to show off. She is a simple being of a nature you have never encountered. That her motivation is vanity is not sufficient for you to understand how she will act in a given situation, however. She wants to conquer so that all who do not admire her may be changed into what you call 'Blackies,' into the Egert's robot type of life. All who do admire her and think her perfect need neither be conquered nor changed. Your every effort must be bent toward convincing her you do admire her, and are only struggling because you are not allowed to see enough of her. It sounds silly, but by flattery you can keep Queen Fal jumping to do everything you wish. By opposing her you will cause your own destruction. Now, do you understand that going to war agaist Fal is not necessary?"

The man with the purple nose rubbed the large roundness of his nose with two blunt fingers. I rubbed my nose too. He said:

"Then, according to your analysis, opposition to her is inviting our own destruction unnecessarily. We are a bunch of damn fools who are telling a robot to wipe us out—is that what you mean?"

Eena smiled and nodded. There were tears in her eyes. "It feels so good to have your people listen to me. I have felt so guilty since Fal landed and began her conquest. You see, Fal does not know what she is doing. She is only four years old in true existence as herself. She is the kind of child who can easily be managed by psychology, but never ruled by the wrong methods. She is not even interested in ruling Earth. What she has done is not her fault, any more than you consider a child who shoots off his father's gun as a criminal. She has just been improperly handled. You must not allow the condition to continue, or your whole world may be devastated. Queen Fal must never be allowed to contact anyone not trained in the Egert psychology."

The man with the purple nose nodded at me, and I nodded back. He asked: "You look on these things as children, then—a new kind of child. Has any of them ever grown up?"

Eena giggled a little embarrassed sound. "I am grown up!" she said.

The general stood up. "You are a

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product of this process who reached an adult mentality?"

"No, not of the Egert process. Of an earlier process, brought into use to revive children dead of accidental causes, and as a cure for incurable diseases. My second childhood was very difficult. You see, Egert's robot process is used only in the case of executed criminals, and upon other offenders who have forfeited the right to normal life. Our laws are not your laws, and our ways are not your ways."

The medical man who had looked at my eyes asked: "Then your use of the word robot is not what ours would be, in any way. To you, a robot is a human whose past life has been wiped away by a calculated procedure, as a punishment, and it is in reality a change which diverts the original life-stream into a new and very different channel. But you seem very normal and human. Why do you insist on this difference of the product from the ordinary human?"

Eena reached for my arm, pushed me forward again. "If you will give this man your regular tests, you will find an intelligence quotient some two hundred per cent higher than normal. Other tests will indicate he is a moron and a completely dependent personality who can not use his mind unless requested to do so by others. The Egert process purposely uses a current of such strength that the thought fields, the cellular screen-tissues of the mind, are repolarized. Some particulary delicate and essential areas of the mind are utterly destroyed by the current."

"Unavoidable, or designed?"

"Designedly so, because Egert was a member of the Nyr justice commission, and would not have been allowed the use of criminals for experimental purposes unless the product was incapable of further crimes."

The solemn face cleared its throat, bellowed: "It seems Queen Fal was not rendered incapable of crime!"

Eena dropped my hand, and faced him belligerently: "Her acts have been crimes only in your sight, and not at all in mine, who was there to see what happened!"

The general with the purple nose picked up an ash tray of metal, breathed upon it and began to polish it with his handkerchief. He spoke in a preoccupied tone:

"To you these creatures, the 'Blackies,' are poor victims of a cruel mutilation practiced by your world against its malcontents. You do not say that, but I gather it. To you, they are harmless children, who need only understanding and careful handling to be useful members of society. To others, of your own country as well as of our world, they are monsters, to be feared and destroyed—is that it?"

The solemn general, who was very fat, struggled to his feet. He pointed his finger at Eena and his bellow was not interesting to me.

"If they are so easily controlled by mere psychology, how is it that you, who were present, were unable to control them. Can you explain that to my satisfaction?"

Eena smiled at him, and his large face turned red for some reason. Eena

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said: "I am a woman. Fal is conscious that she does not have every feminine quality, and because of my control of her, there grew up, outside my knowledge, a block in Fal's mind against me. Fal is vain, and I am pretty. Jealousy accumulated, and she overcame my inept control at a time when I was suffering from space sickness. Since that time, she has kept me a perpetual prisoner. What she has done since was brought about by her inevitable conflict with an environment, with people and circumstances to which she was in no way adapted or adjusted by preconditioning."

"Are you trying to say Fal has done what she has done through others' blunders as much as through intent?"

Eena shrilled, a little anger in her that she had such a hard time with the language and with attempting to convey a picture of conditions they could not see because of having no comparable experiences.

"Yes, Fal has but two main intents. One is to serve other people, the other intent is to be admired. The fact that the 'Blackies' have recruited by murder and the Egert method of revivification is due to the fact they have been taught by hypnotic conditioning that the Egert method is a good change to a perfect life from an imperfect life. They think they are doing you a favor because they have been trained to think they were done a favor by being made into what they are. My world is not perfect, you know. They are the product of an ancient cruelty, a callous place in the race-mind of my own people. I am trying to be fair to them—and they would not be dangerous if you were used to their kind of mind and did not oppose them. They would refrain from their present path once they understood what you wanted them to do—because they are conditioned to serve. They do not want to destroy. They want to protect people from you. They want to protect their own lives from you. And their new world they have found and tried to serve must not be—in their minds—attacked by you."

"What fools we have been!" murmured the man with the purple nose, setting down the ash tray and lighting a cigarette. "All we have to do is tell the Queen we have decided to support her because we admire her, and she will do anything we suggest to her. It might be very simple . . . but can we call off the war now?"

"Send her the message, and see what comes of it."

But the generals, however thick-headed Eena might think them, were suspicious. One of them, a gray-headed, thin-faced man who had been listening very intently and with a somewhat scornful expression, remarked:

"There is that about this little stranger that appeals mightily to the male, which gives me to think that perhaps she is but another dodge—a kind of bait to trap us into a position where Fal can dispose of us without danger. Just how do we know that she is what she represents herself to be? We are accepting her at

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face value, with no attempt made to determine if she is counterfeit or good gold coin!"

Another officer spoke up, fixing a pair of steely gray eyes on Eena: "Your defense of the Queen's motives and your excuses for her technique of murdering U. S. citizens to provide material for her army of 'robots' as you call them, particularly incline me to think you may be an emissary from a wily and villainous murderess!"

Eena flushed. Her face hurt me to watch. She wheeled on her tiny feet and marched from the room. I followed her.

When I came up with her she was working with the coat of heavy wool fabric which she had worn. It was one of Queen Fal's garments, and I smelled the weird, stimulating scent of the strange and huge flowers in the gardens of the Palace of Darkness. Eena had discarded the ill-fitting tights and coat for the better fitting if less feminine garb of a male soldier. I watched her as she extracted a little metal box from the lining of the coat. I had not known it was there. She must have hidden it in the last minute as we prepared to leave the Palace of Darkness.

Eena marched back as rapidly as she had left, and again faced the row of lined and weary faces behind the long table. I took my place behind Eena, watching the box in her hand. The little box gave a sharp click, and a vague glow came from it. I think I was the only one who noticed it. The generals froze, and sat rigidly, their eyes unwinking upon little Eena. I stood with my mouth open, watching all of these people begin to act like "Blackies," sitting motionless and waiting for orders. I was very interested, and I reached out and patted the elf on one little shoulder.

"Now they will listen to me, eh?" she asked, and I nodded, feeling very happy, and very sleepy.

The rest of the day was a haze of people coming and going, and of orders barked at them by the man at the center of the table—the man with the purple nose. Eena took a chair beside him, and one of the generals who had sat in that chair stood stiffly behind her at attention. Toward the end of the day, a private came in with a load of electrical material. Then another and another, each with an arm load of wire and gadgets and tubes and other electrical objects. I was unable to help the engineer who came after them and began to assemble some strange apparatus under Eena's direction. He said:

"Get that zombie out of my way before I blow a fuse."

Eena ordered me to sit down, which made me feel sad.

After while I knew the device would be a larger and more-powerful control box such as she carried in her hand. But I knew no one else understood that. I did not speak. No one asked me to speak. The elf smiled.

My mind was functioning more and more clearly. I was beginning to realize thoroughly I was a "Blackie"!

The meeting of the rebels with

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Queen Fal was set up like a stage affair, as gaudy and showy as can be imagined. All the generals were in their bib and tucker with all their decorations, the flags were flying, bands playing and doughboys lined up at attention for miles. Fal was driven up in a limousine. In the distance, just visible, the big ship from Nyr hung like a reminder that Fal was not unprepared for treachery.

There were also present an array of "loyal" army officers, in gold braid and medals, with the black jeweled medallion of Fal's own forces on their breast. And in the distance a massed array of "official army" might in the form of tanks, wheeled guns, marching troops—plenty to overwhelm our own party if occasion offered. In reality, the whole thing looked like a surrender by our forces, and I suspect that Eena knew this and had planned it so—to flatter the Queen.

Eena herself was present, now disguised in a remodeled male uniform as an orderly. She carried the metal box in a briefcase, and it never left her hand.

In Fal's hand was a metal box identical to the one Eena had used—and I looked at Eena. She only smiled and nodded.

When Fal turned those deep compelling eyes of hers on me, my knees turned to water, my face flushed. I was conscious all over again of that same thrill of peril and mystery and infinite attraction.

She may have been dead once, but she certainly wasn't any more. Eena's explanation of their essential difference from human flesh and their completely unknown potentialities for growth into a new form of life came back to my mind, looking at Fal. She was a beautiful as I had ever seen her, and if she was a mad ex-criminal, once executed on that far planet for some crime—if she was in truth but a monster, a female Frankenstein—still she bore within her that potential future, a world of the future at variance with any ordinary human being. Nature has a way of making life want life. It is Nature's great law—that life must produce life. It is the great magnet with which she crushes male to female inexorably, in every species. Fal carried that primal urge like a torch in her eyes, in her glorious erect figure, in her grace and strength and perfect form. Everything male in me responded to that flame in Fal's body, and she knew it as a musician knows a good instrument. I think I knew from that glance she gave me that day that Fal had always recognized in me the responsive instrument, one designed for her touch.

However, Eena clicked her box before Queen Fal had picked her face out of the many in the same kind of uniform. And in the distance, the great machine Eena had constructed was turned on, and froze the whole assembly into the strange unmoving attitudes which pleased Eena so much. I was frozen myself, even more than before, and could not have moved without Eena's command.

As soon as this occurred, the spaceship settled over the meeting place. It let down a ladder. There were too many people present for it to come closer. Eena went up the ladder first

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and entered the ship. After her moved Fal her swift sureness gone, her steps mechanical and slow. I moved then, for neither of my selves wanted those two to pass out of my life. Or perhaps I could not help myself if I wanted to. I went up the ladder after Queen Fal, and after me came one by one the many black-clad servants of the Queen. Then the ladder was drawn in, and the ship rose into the air.

After a time, when the strange weight left my limbs, I got up from the acceleration cushions and went to Queen Fal. I stood motionless before her. She did not speak, only looked at me empty-eyed and waiting. It was not my Queen of Darkness, not my Fal, but a mere robot like myself. I turned to Eena, who sat in a great soft chair, her head back, resting. I said: "Eena Deerwin, what is wrong with my Queen?"

She smiled and shook her head. "Everything will be all right, dear fool in love. Soon you will have the Queen and her 'Blackies' all to yourself, for I am going to leave you. But just now it is safer to keep them in control."

After what was a very long time, many days perhaps, for my body was very tired of waiting for orders, the ship approached a small green ball and a flame-bright ball that circled far ahead.

Eena turned my head to watch out the port as we descended. It was very beautiful land upon which the ship settled. There were gigantic trees and waving grasses and flowering waters; but there were no people, and very few animals that I could see. Eena said:

"This world has never been inhabited, according to the charts, because it lacks many ores essential for an industrial world. But for Fal and her kind, it is perfect, and no one will bother you here. I will return, after a time, bringing others who need a new chance to live a new life. On Nyr are others, and on Earth there are still many who were changed by Fal's attempt to become a ruler of a people who were not her kind. Here she can rule, and you can worship as you please."

As the ship rose, a weight left my heart. We stood, a thousand strong, behind the slim, strong beauty of our Queen. A new life was beginning for the Egert robot.

THE END

EXIT: THE GONDOLA

AT LAST it's happened! Hang out the black crepe, and make with the crocodile tears. The famous, historical, romantic, graceful, storied and much painted Venetian gondola might just as well give up the ghost! No longer will the citizens of Venice be content to sail placidly (or is it row—or paddle?) along the canals of the dampest city in the world; and for why? For because on February 27, 1950, a silver-colored flying saucer was reported seen flying at great speed about 6000 feet up near Caioggia, Italy. The inhabitants stared up, then stared down—at the slow, outdated, unromantic, ungraceful, un-storied and probably un-painted gondolas. Said they: "Now there's the way to travel—why not make our gondolas "saucer-shaped," and just *skim* along!"

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NEWS OF THE MONTH

Latest reports on what our readers are doing. Fan clubs, social events and personalities in the limelight.

CURRENTLY scheduled for release in July by Frederick Fell, Inc. is THE BEST SCIENCE-FICTION STORIES: 1950, by Everett Bleiler and T. E. Dikty. This year's volume presents 13 top-notch stories, the BEST of the year, including yarns like Bob Krepp's FIVE YEARS IN THE MARMALADE which first appeared in *Fantastic Adventures*. If you have THE BEST SCIENCE-FICTION STORIES: 1949, you won't want to miss this new anthology; if you missed the first book, take our advice and get *both* of them now.

The NORWESCON Committee reports that Don Day has been elected Chairman of the Membership Committee filling the vacancy left by John deCourcy's going to California on business. Which reminds that this is as good a time as any to urge you to send your membership dollar to the NORWESCON Membership Committee, Box 8517, Portland 7, Oregon.

The Athenaeum Press, London, England is publishing a British edition of FATE, our sister magazine. The first issue went on sale during May.

Shasta Publishers, Chicago, Ill. have taken over the publication of Stanley Mullen's novel *Kinsmen of the Dragon*, which is scheduled for release within the next six or eight weeks. This is an original novel, written in a style reminiscent of the late A. Merritt.

From Guam comes news that S. J. Byrne is working on a new story for OTHER WORLDS which he says will be one of the best interplanetary stories he has ever written. He's kidding, of course, because he's never written an interplanetary before, but we can guarantee it will be a top novel—yes, it's another novel!

The picture "Flying Saucer," which was scheduled for release in March, did come out, but it was retitled "Project X." In case you missed it, you didn't miss anything.

Artist Bill Terry has gone into partnership with artist Joe W. Tillotson (otherwise known as Robert Fuqua), and together they are going to turn out more science fiction artwork. Robert Fuqua's return to science fiction will be heralded with joy by many who remember his famous "gadget" covers on the early Ziff-Davis *Amazing Stories*.

Our new sister magazine (titled *Imagination*) will make its bow on August 1, your editor's 40th birthday. It will feature a cover by Hannes Bok, and will contain stories by Willard Hawkins, James Blish, Kris Neville, Chester S. Geier and others.

Bob Tucker, who has been reported dead by so many fans (strictly as a joke) is far from dead, to judge from a recent story he has just sold to OTHER WORLDS which has its editors excited. Congratulations, Bob.

Lester Del Rey has decided to go into writing as a full-time occupation, giving up his connection with Scott Meredith's literary agency. Lester has promised to do a very unusual off-trail story for OTHER WORLDS as one of the first jobs on his new schedule.

William P. McGivern recently came to Chicago to prove a point—but not in science fiction. Some months ago he got into a poker game with Bill Hamling of *Fantastic Adventures*, played exactly one hand, and walked off the only winner of the evening. Said Hamling: "A fluke." This time McGivern played all night, and took Bill for almost the same amount. Said Hamling: "A fluke." Wonder if he oughtn't to concede the point? But Bill *did* sign Mac up for an extended series for *Fantastic Adventures*! Diplomacy, Bill?

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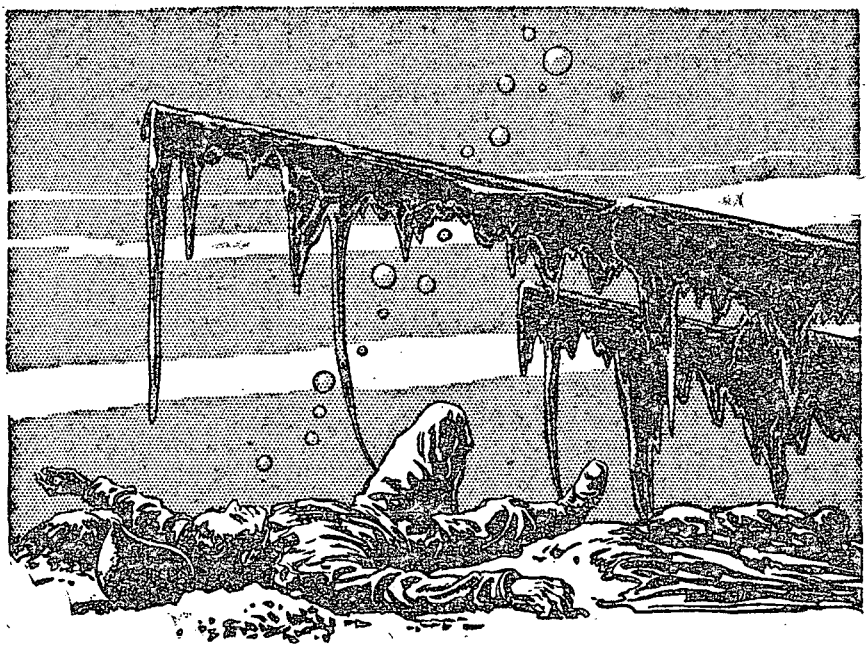

Illustration by Malcolm Smith

COLOSSUS III

By S. J. BYRNE

FOR six days the battle had raged. The fifty Agarthian ships had attacked the enemy's stronghold without benefit of allies above or below the ground. The Golden Guardsmen had not yet made contact for some strange reason. And the Moon People had not been heard from.

As a consequence, only thirty-eight of the original fifty Agarthian space ships were left. The rest had been consumed by the superior concentration of fire from below. So now the Agarthian fleet was holding back until its allies, the Agarthian Army Clans, could catch up.

The Agarthian Clan of Ravenoe preserved a chivalric type of life. Mediaeval dress for the women and common men, and the symbolic chain mail shirt and skirt of knighthood for those who earned it and were included in the Council of the clan.

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In this final story of the establishment of a new era of peace on Earth by the armies of Agarthi, the Nameless Ones bring to bear the most awful of their evilly-wrought weapons.

Rugged Charles of Ravenoe, the patriarch leader, strictly maintained the valuable traditions which gave character to the clan and provided a structural routine for every one. In the Ravenoe clan were farmers, artisans, soldiers and knights, plus their women, who were highly respected regardless of the station of their immediate family.

To this clan, Janice and her girl companions had completely attached themselves. Indeed, if they had not already married, they were betrothed, because the men of Ravenoe were a handsome and of virile lot who knew how to state their cases even better than the majority of fellows in the surface world. Only Ingaborg and Janice were neither married nor betrothed, although their suitors had become a problem. Not that Ingaborg had the intention of saying no forever to her tall, auburn haired, broad-

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shouldered Sir William. She was merely biding her time.

Janice's very ardent suitor was David, son of Charles. Charles had had many sons during his hundred and thirty years of life, but this latest son, now only twenty-five years old, was his favorite. Strong, tall and clean-limbed, acquiline featured, blond and blue-eyed, strong of purpose and daring in battle, he was a princely lad to see. Everybody knew that one day he would certainly be a knight of the Council and no doubt replace his father as the chief, a century or two hence.

His one weakness was Janice. At the sight of her beauty that first day he had fallen irremediably in love. Janice saw in him much to be admired, but she held him at least at a short distance by explaining that she was already betrothed to another.

To this, however, he had said, "By the Saints! I'll change thy mind about that! Dost not know my life walks at thy side?—that it is as inescapably attached to thee as thy shadow? I cherish thee above all other goals in existence. Either having thee, or seeking thee to have, will be the way I shall end my days!"

"Even if I should marry another?" she asked him, coquettishly.

"I am unable and unwilling to sustain such a thought in my mind," he answered.

Of such steadfastness of purpose is knighthood made . . .

Janice's days were busy ones filled with responsibility. It had early been revealed that she had come recently from Agarthi, that she was in some way protected by and in communication with Agarthi, and that she was a scientist in her own right. Unladylike as it appeared in the light of their chivalric conventions, they were nevertheless impressed by her swordsmanship. Charles of Ravenoe made special allowance for this "mannishness" by explaining that she was like a second Joan of Arc, come to inspire them in their purpose and to even help lead them against the enemy.

There had been occasions when exploring parties had come in contact with detachments of the schwalbenkorps, and some pitched battles had ensued. Janice had taken part in many such skirmishes, in fact, was usually in the front ranks, with heat ray, disintegrating gun, or merely the bright sword that Sir Charles had given her. Surviving members of the Schwalbenkorps had carried back stories of her, with some exaggeration of the details in regard to her beauty and skill. Her ability to paralyze whole platoons of the enemy by means of her hidden microtelepathy before the force fields could shield her out had added a dash of magic to the story. And thus had the legend of the *Gruebenhexe* (Cave Witch) grown up among the A-1 Schwalbenkorps men.

On one such excursion, they ran into more trouble than they had anticipated. Janice and David, accompanied by Sir William and Ingaborg, led a small group of Ravenoe men and three young women into a very deep series of caverns. The way led sharply downward on a badly clut-

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cered and broken spiral ramp. They carried sufficient weapons to defend themselves against a company or two of the Schwalbenkorps, plus provision for a week. In spite of the very heavy atmosphere of those great depths, and the sputtering gloom that resulted from the extreme age and deterioration of the lighting system, everyone was in good spirits. This was largely the result of the happiness of Sir William and David at being in the company of the women they loved.

Janice even went so far as to lag behind alone with David and allow him to sing haunting love verses in mediaeval English that had been passed down by his ancestors from chivalric times that preceded Chaucer. He was peculiarly gifted with a strong but lyrical tenor voice that was very attractive to feminine ears. He even managed to kiss her once, but that made her decide to join the main group again. She liked David, but his most ardent approaches and chivalrous attentions still failed to dissipate her vision of Agarthi and the memory of Rocky. She was relying on the King's promise that someday she would see him again.

The whole group of explorers, numbering thirty-six in all, suddenly came to a stop. The tunnel came to an abrupt end. But all present were aware of the fact that this was a very unusual circumstance. The ancient tunnels just did not end in blind alleys. They always led to a cave or a ramp. This tunnel, it was obvious, had been deliberately *walled off*.

"Why should anyone wall up the tunnel like that?" said David, tapping the wall testily with the barrel of his gun.

"For either one of two reasons," replied Sir William. "To protect themselves from an enemy, or to seal up something of value. On the other side of that wall may be a lost Agarthian colony, a space ship, or the Lord knows what!"

"Whatever it is must have been there a long time," said Janice. "These caves and tunnels down here at this level are the most ancient looking we have seen."

Everyone, including Ingaborg, looked in silent wonderment at the wall before them. Perhaps it concealed a secret that was seventy to eighty thousand years old, from the days when the last of the mastodons roamed the European plains, and when giants first began to walk *in* the Earth.

"Let us open it," suggested David.

"How?" queried Sir William. "We have no cavern boring equipment, and this wall is of *densified rock*."

David's white teeth flashed in a smile. He looked about him at the accompanying warriors and counted a minimum of fifty disintegrating guns. "Hast thou ever wondered what might happen," he said, "if fifty guns were concentrated upon one target?"

Sir William raised his bushy, auburn brows in an expression of enthusiasm. "By my sword!" he exclaimed. "'Tis a possibility!"

"Let's hope," warned Ingaborg, "that we don't blow ourselves out of here at the same time."

Sir William, who wore a handsome,

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downward curving mustache to match his brows and mane of auburn hair, smiled happily. "What matters it, my fair one," he jested, "whether it be this side of the grave or the other where we spend our days—as long as it be together?" He drew his guns and waved them before the others. "To do is to dare, and to dare is to live! Come on, ye *pistoleros!* Line up thy guns with me!"

Janice stayed behind the lines with Ingaborg and the three dark-haired girls who had come along. She and her ever-ready guns had become inseparable in these perilous days, but she did not choose to use them against such a non-belligerent target as a blank wall.

"Just a moment!" she said, suddenly, and everybody turned to look at her. "We are too jubilant a bunch to think well what we are doing. Sir William omitted one other possible reason why that wall should have been put there."

Sir William frowned with displeasure at being criticized by a woman, but always an allowance had to be made for this coppery-haired, radiantly beautiful creature who had come among them like a mysterious agent of the gods. Her words were never to be taken in vain.

"Speak, then," said Sir William, doubly disgruntled by the beaming pride and adoration that was so painfully evident on young David's face as he looked at Janice.

"Who knows," said Janice, "that it may not be *a plug against the sea?"*

All present suddenly looked pale and frightened, even the mighty thewed Sir William. Here they were, seven miles beneath the surface of the Earth, with the North Sea lying just beyond Holland's dykes, not far distant from their present location. On rare occasions, the sea had found its way into the deep caverns and had to be sealed out. At this depth the water pressure would be roughly 18,000 pounds, or *nine tons* per square inch—enough to crush every last one of them into microscopic shreds before they could take a step. *And they had been on the verge of opening the wall!*

Cold perspiration stood out on Sir William's forehead. He slumped, visibly. But he said, "Thanks to thee, girl! We have been taught a serious lesson, whether there be water beyond that wall or not. Men, bring forward the penetrovisiray!"

They had brought along several cars, on one of which were mounted several large pieces of equipment. The second car was a flat, empty chassis, for carrying back what they found. The lead car with the penetrovisiray was rolled forward, and Sir William, himself, climbed aboard to look through the wall.

It was a light, simple model and could not transmit light ahead to illuminate the object to be observed. Therefore, Sir William looked into a shadowy darkness on the screen. A glimmer of light from the lingering remnants of an ancient lighting system showed him the dim outlines of what looked like piles of rubble. Some of the stuff looked like broken glass, because it glittered feebly, in varying colors. But there was no water there.

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"It seems to be merely an abandoned tunnel," said David, looking over Sir William's shoulder, "half filled with rubble. Hardly worth the trouble to open up the wall."

"But we do not know where the tunnel may lead," said Sir William.

So the car was rolled back, and again the gunmen took their stand. They all took careful aim at a mark in the center of the wall, and at a command from Sir William they fired.

The great wall disappeared in a semi-explosive flash that threw them back off their feet. The air of the tunnel rushed into the opened section like a torrent. Everyone had to lean back at an angle to keep from being drawn forward.

"That place was deliberately left vacuum sealed," said Janice to Ingaborg, her hair blowing around her face in the strong breeze. "That can only mean that someone was trying to preserve the contents of the tunnel against oxidation and dampness. There should be something of value there."

Sir William was of the same opinion. He called for a lamp, which was handed to him by one of the warriors. He turned the knob that released an infinitesimal amount of nuclear energy, and a piercingly bright beam of light flashed out ahead.

Silently, he walked forward with the lamp into the unlocked tunnel. And as silently the others followed.

What they immediately stumbled over made Agarthian history . . .

None of them could speak at the sight of what was there in profusion all around them and scattered ahead as far as they could see, as though hidden in great haste. It was too much to grasp all at once.

Treasure. Incalculable and incredible. The long accumulated hoards of perhaps a whole race of people, the ransom not of a king or kingdoms, but of a world. Nor was it volume alone that impressed. It was the exquisite, other-world beauty of the glittering necklaces, diadems, crowns, breastplates of enticing and risque design, girdles, jeweled sandals, jewel and metal encrusted tapestries, sceptres, and jewel set table-ware of gold and rarer metals still. There were nectar glasses carved out of solid rubies, lockets cut from solid emeralds. In some long forgotten queen's vanity set one of the girls found false fingernails cut from unknown jewels that glowed like blood-red fire in the dark, and marvelously thin lip coverings and ear rings of the same materials. They tried to imagine the spectacle of the wearer of these adornments, her lips glowing like red fire in the dark, only to be cold and unyielding when touched! These beautiful things had belonged to a race so highly cultured as to have grown semi-cultish in its tastes and affairs of the heart! Here were twin black pearls from the ocean of another world, attached to ear rings that were designed to shed perfume from hidden receptacles onto the shoulders of the wearer, or perhaps some more bewitching substance to entrance and enslave the helpless heart at the most strategic moment.

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The ingenuity of a race whose women could "turn on" their perfume when most desired left them dumbfounded.

Everything they found was large in size, signifying that this had all belonged at one time to a giant race that averaged about twice the size of normal terrestrials.

Sir William found a stone and held it up for all to see. It was of a color which the eye tried to catch but could not, a thing which glowed faintly with some sort of reddish purple light within. It was mounted in the natural shape in which it had been found—uncut, because it seemed no one had ever been able to find anything hard enough to cut it. The stone Sir William held was mounted on the central medallion of a giant necklace. When the others saw it the men gasped and the women reached for it in speechless desire, including Ingaborg and Janice.

But Sir William held it away from them, his face frowning darkly. "It is the legendary *miser's stone,*" he said, "a thing so rare and ancient and incredible that the early Agarthians used to amuse their children with stories about it, as though even to them it were some fairy tale emerged from a forgotten antiquity. The discovery of this single stone indicates that the treasure is one of the oldest things on or in the Earth, and that it comes perhaps even from an alien universe. The miser stone has the peculiar property of being able to absorb and ensnare forever within itself the *soul* of him who worships and covets it above all else. At least so the legend goes. Each stone can contain one soul, and this is supposed to impart to it a greenish, inner fire. Note that this one has not yet acquired the 'green' of a captured soul."

David laughed. "Thinkest thou that we are children?" he said. "What thou sayest cannot be true. It is, after all, but some pleasant legend to be told to children."

"Beware!" said Sir William, sternly. "Therein lies its danger! To fear it is to be protected. But now I would tell ye more. Once the stone acquires a soul, the soul seeks escape. Its only escape is to attract another soul. If some new miser covets the stone, his soul goes in and the imprisoned one escapes into the miser's body, to lead a far better life than it did before. Legend had it that the race that originally found the miser's stones used them for the improvement of men's souls. Misers and those who coveted the objects and symbols of vanity and power more than the happiness of their fellow men fell victims to the stones. They lost their souls. After years of maddening imprisonment, if they escaped into another's body they inevitably became great, benevolent and wise."

"A very pretty tale," smiled Ingaborg, "but just so much sales propaganda. How much are you selling them for?"

Janice, in the meantime, had walked unobtrusively into the shadows behind Sir William and was looking around on her own account. She could not banish from her thoughts the memory of an old German folk legend on which the story of Siegfried had

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been founded. In that story, a certain race of curious beings who lived beneath the Rhine River (Janice knew they were now precisely underneath the Rhine!) and guarded the most fabulous treaure in the world. Amazed by the points of similarity, she could not suppress the romantic idea that this might, indeed, be the legendary Treasure of the *Niebelungs!*

Suddenly, she found inside a golden case a stone just like the one Sir William was exhibiting. It was uncut and unmounted, about as big around as her thumbnail. But its inner glow and its hint of a coloration which could not be registered by the human senses attracted her wierdly. Most startling of all, this one had a greenish glow, deep within the aura of its natural light! She recalled Sir William's words: "Each stone can contain one soul, and this is supposed to impart to it a greenish, inner fire." Of course, she did not believe the ancient legend, but the coincidence intrigued her. The scientist in her made her curious as to the cause of the very wierd attraction she felt for the jewel. On an inexplicable impulse, she secretly concealed the softly glowing jewel in a small pocket inside her belt and returned to the others.

"What are we going to do with all this?" she asked. "It's enough to break the international jewelry market!"

"Such treasures as these," said Sir William, "are not good. We were mistaken to unseal this place. It would be the source of evil temptation once fallen into the hands of ordinary men. Let us bury it again."

"Oh no!" protested David. "We must take some of it!"

At that moment everybody turned around to see a company of German soldiers round a curve in the tunnel which they, themselves, had used to get to this place. The enemy was investigating the cause of the sudden wind storm. When the Germans saw the Agarthians they immediately began to retreat, firing radium bullets as they went. Only one, the commanding officer, had a disintegrating gun, but outside of this they were ill-equipped to fight an armed group of Agarthians at close quarters. The sight that had frightened them most of all was that of Janice with her coppery hair.

"Die Gruebenhexe!" they shouted, pressing frantically back against their fellows.

The men of Ravenoe had a prescribed plan of action for cases like this. No commands from Sir William were necessary. The car with the ray equipment was immediately manned and the warriors crowded close behind it. The only tactic used was a charge, with all weapons firing.

"They must not live to see or tell of this treasure!" exclaimed Sir William. He detailed ten men to bring down the roof of the tunnel in front of the entrance to the cache with their guns, so that the treasure would be hidden once more.

The retreating Schwalbenkorps unit had just about been wiped out when more German troops suddenly appeared, marching silently, rank up-

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on rank, by the hundreds. These new troops were somehow different than the others. Their faces were expressionless and every platoon looked as though it were composed of identical duplicates.

"The D.T.'s!" cried Janice.

The Doppelgänger were on the march . . . men with but a fraction of a soul.

The chief asset of the Doppelgänger was numbers. They did not possess the ancient weapons, only radium pistols and rifles, a few death-ray generators, some grenades, and a few portable rocket cannons. No mass military maneuvers had ever been designed for close work in tunnels. Here only the front ranks could get at each other, and the rest had to wait. The heavier equipment was for use only in the larger areas of the caves. So Doppelgänger technique in this case was to charge right into the fire and drown it with the sheer weight of numbers.

Rank after rank came charging into their disintegrating fire. Platoon after platoon fell before the combined blast of the cannon mounted on the car and the marksmen behind it. Some bullets getting through had taken a small toll among the Agarthians, and even David was bleeding from a shot that had creased the left side of his face. Six of the other men had been seriously wounded by rifle fire and one group of four had been blown to bits by the explosion of a radium bullet.

In the meantime, the detail of ten men assigned to bury the entrance to the treasure cache finished its work and came into the fight. But the Doppelgänger began to break through their defense by the sheer weight of numbers. They were too close now to use guns, so it became a matter of hand to hand fighting. Sir William and David and others, including Janice, drew swords and began to wreak havoc among the aggressors. Ingaborg still watched for chances with a borrowed disintegrating gun, however.

Still the Doppelgänger flooded in. In spite of Janice's expert, lightning swift swordplay, about five of the enemy pressed her to the tunnel's wall and tried to choke her and steal her guns. She sank beneath their weight, her vision dimming, two hands brutally pressing her throat.

Before she could bring her micro-telepathy into play (which worked only feebly in these depths) David came. He beheaded the man at her throat and pierced two others through the back. Two more became only parts of men as Ingaborg's gun found its mark.

David knelt beside her and took her into his arms. "Janice!" he cried. "Janice!"

When she opened her eyes to look at him he kissed her. "Thank God you're alive!" he said.

Just then the Doppelgänger began a hasty retreat, because it seemed that superior Agarthian forces had arrived. They were pushing the Germans into a branch tunnel, driving forward in great, tank-like armored cars that supported powerful force-field generators and other weapons.

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There were hundreds of these new arrivals.

But David still held Janice in his strong arms. He said, "I cannot let thee go unless thou sayest my heart does not pine and wait for thee in vain!"

Janice put her arms around his neck, but she said swiftly into his ear, "I admire you very much, David, but I belong forever to someone else. Besides, you pick the darnedest times and places for such things! Here come our friends! Now please let me go!"

David frowned angrily at the new warriors, then shrugged his shoulders. He let her go. "Still I'll follow thee," he said, "wherever thou goest, until I see with mine own eyes this betrothed one of yours!" He wiped his long sword on a dead German's coat sleeve and shot the weapon into its scabbard with a *clank* that startled everybody around him.

The newcomers were giants, ranging from ten to twelve feet in height. And they were beautiful, both men and women, highly intelligent and alert. They wore a strange type of chain mail that looked like scales, their jeweled belts supporting giant disintegrating guns, and they seemed as if they were from another world. But Sir William knew them.

"The main body of our army from Mexico!" he exclaimed to Ingaborg. "They are the highest type Agarthian warriors on Earth, and it is they who have called their brothers, the Moon People, to our aid! They are en route to the rendezvous!"

Sir William looked small beside Rondor, the chief of the Mexicans, who was fully twelve feet tall. But the two men greeted each other enthusiastically.

"Thanks be to ye!" said Sir William. "We were hard pressed by numbers!"

Rondor's large blue eyes calmly surveyed the men of Ravenoe, rested a longer moment on Ingaborg and Janice, then looked directly at Sir William.

"Did you know," he said, in a booming voice, "that the rendezvous is calling all units together? It is an emergency. Agarthi has declared war on the Nameless Ones ahead of schedule. We must assemble at once for the march on Berlin."

Sir William and David looked quickly at each other. Janice grasped David's arm. *The time had come!* In her mind she thought: *Gotterdämmerung!*

"But the Moon People!" protested Sir William. "They have not yet arrived!"

"And the Golden Guardsmen!" put in Janice. "We can't attack without *them!*"

Rondor shook his head. "You may check with *Twenty One,*" he answered, "but our orders are to attack at once!"

At that moment, one of the men of the Ravenoe clan called to Sir William from the car that carried the visiray and the electronophone.

"A call from *Twenty One,* Sir!"

Rondor, the Mexican leader, several of his followers, and Janice, David and Ingaborg crowded closely behind Sir William as he stood at the

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side of the car and took the electronophone. As he listened to the receiver, his eyes widened with excitement. Orders came so swiftly that he had no time to reply. He handed the phone back to the operator on the car.

"Sir Charles informs me," he said, "that, having checked our position, he finds we are cut off from all possibility of returning to the rendezvous. The enemy has struck and struck hard. Both Doppelgänger and A-1 troops, equipped with tanks, are filling all the main tunnels and are intent upon eliminating all Agarthians. Our orders are to do what the main group out of *Twenty One* is doing. Attack Berlin at once, head on! Thank God our Mexican friends have joined us!"

Doppelgänger battalions led by hard-hitting A-1 Schwalbenkorps companies, spearheaded by cannon firing and flame throwing tanks, filled all the main tunnels leading from Berlin. These were backed by division after division of more Doppelgänger. Their orders were to head for the surface and invade Europe when the moment of victory over the Agarthians arrived.

For five days, Sir William's Ravenoe group fought. At first they had gone forward with their powerful allies, the Mexicans, and there was nothing much that could stand in their way. But in the higher levels they encountered a much greater concentration of the enemy. There was great confusion and much hand to hand conflict. The Mexicans disappeared in a tunnel of their own selection, as though intent upon a newly devised, secret strategy. Other Agarthians appeared and disappeared in the course of the ceaseless battle, again and again.

On the sixth day, only Sir William, David, Janice, Ingaborg, and six other Ravenoe warriors were still together in one group. They were very close to Berlin now, and their danger had increased so much as to be wellnigh insurmountable. In the caves and tunnels they had fought side by side, Sir William, David and Janice using their swords in close range fighting, while Ingaborg and some of the other warriors covered them with the disintegrating gun fire whenever the enemy emerged inadvertently from a guard screen.

On the previous night they had managed to conceal themselves in a small cavern, where they had procured a much needed rest and attended to their wounds. Here they had worked out a last, desperate plan of action. Now that they were in the higher levels, Janice's microtelepathy was again effective. She could paralyze as many as a hundred men at a time. The paralyzed ones they would wade through, with Janice always trying to paralyze more. Those that pressed through by weight of numbers the ten of them slaughtered. But they knew their good luck could not hold out. They had to seek out a larger force of their own kind. Through microtelepathic guidance, Janice had located a numerous group of warriors within five miles of their location. Several transverse tunnels led to where they were battling. It was decided to make a dash to join

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the others.

But they did not know that an alert penetrovisiray operator had located and identified Janice, or that a special unit had been dispatched from Fortress Berlin specifically to capture the "Cave Witch." One of their pieces of equipment was a force field generator of a type that could block her paralysis beams, or anybody else's, for that matter.

The first resistance that Sir William's group met on the sixth day was in the form of scattered patrols of the enemy, whom they quickly dispatched. As their progress became relatively swift, they took courage.

"We may make it yet!" said Janice.

But at that moment they rounded a curve and came face to face with the special task force sent out to get Janice—*alive.* It was spearheaded by a tank that looked somehow different than others they had seen. Following it came a regiment of Schwalbenkorps men. There were no Doppelgänger. These were hand-picked A-1 troops.

Sir William fired his gun point blank at the tank, and nothing happened.

"They are shielded!" he exclaimed.

This meant that the advantage of surprise was lost. They were at the mercy of a devilish looking flame-cannon that bristled from the tank's snout.

To Janice's surprise, a voiced barked over a loudspeaker, from the tank, in German, and addressed her.

"We shall not molest your friends," it said, "if you, yourself, will surrender. You are wanted alive at headquarters."

When Janice translated this for Sir William and David, David shouted at the tank, "Ye can go to the devil!" And he drew his sword in a spontaneous expression of defiance, forgetful of the more potent gun in his other hand, which, however, was equally ineffectual under the circumstances.

"I would rather go with them," said Janice, "than have us all be killed."

"We may have a chance," said Ingaborg, "since they must take you alive. I'm for fighting it through. Rothbart may still live, Janice. I'd die before I'd see either one of us go back to him."

"We fight!" said Sir William, grimly.

The officer in the tank must have understood English. Learning that his quarry would not surrender, he gave orders for the troops behind the tank to charge. These men were all fast moving commando fighters. They came forward brandishing rifles and bayonets.

As they ran through their own ray guard screen, half of them disappeared in disintegrating gunfire, but the remainder closed the gap, and from there on it was bayonet against sword. Of all of Sir William's group, only Ingaborg knew nothing about swords. She still used her gun when she could.

Janice and David and Sir William were at the head of their group, fighting shoulder to shoulder, with Inga-

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borg just behind them. David and Sir William were big, fighting men of old, much more powerful than the German soldiers. They took a ghastly toll, but the odds were against them. Janice tried to paralyze the men by means of her microtelepathy, but the tank shielded the Germans from the effects of the paralysis beams. They had come well informed about the "Cave Witch."

Suddenly, Sir William was shot in the chest, and the bullet was followed by a bayonet, even as the stalwart warrior beheaded his attacker. Then he fell to the ground.

"William!" cried Ingaborg. She threw herself down beside him and kissed his mouth even as it reddened with blood.

He could only look at her yearningly as death hurried to take him. He squeezed her hand once, and he smiled. Then his tousled head went limp in her arms.

Her eyes were filled with tears, but her mouth, reddened by the blood of the man whom she had learned to love deeply, straightened in a terrible expression of hatred—for the enemy.

Janice and David could not stop fighting to console her, but both felt as though they shared her broken heart when they thought of the fine man whom they had all just lost. They could only fight harder and more bitterly in the face of their overwhelming enemy.

Ingaborg snatched both of Janice's disintegrating guns and rose grimly to her feet. Heedless of the flailing bayonets, she stood in plain sight of all and opened fire, point blank, at the mass of soldiery before her. But the tank crew had foreseen this, and her fire was blocked by an extended guard screen. So she jumped through the screen, into the very midst of the enemy, and before the screen could be shortened the middle of a score of men disappeared and their heads dropped through a nothingness where their chests and torsos had been. Ingaborg stood in the center of a mass of bloodied heads and kicking, bodiless legs, her guns still blazing annihilation.

From behind her, Germans lunged at her with bayonets.

"Ingaborg! 'Look out!" cried Janice. And she came forward with her sword just in time to divert two deadly bayonet thrusts. As Ingaborg turned, one bayonet came down hard on her hands and knocked her guns loose, so then she grappled with the soldier who had attacked her.

Death for all of them was so close it seemed they could feel its breath on their necks.

Then, suddenly, something very strange and unexpected occurred. Swiftly there shot up the tunnel toward the German tank three torpedo shaped objects. Each was, in fact, about the size of a torpedo, but in an instant it could be observed that these were miniature space ships! Full-armed ships of war, whose crews could not have been more than two inches high!

There was no way of knowing where they had come from, nor was there time to conjecture, because they brought lightning swift action with them. In one flash, the German re-

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sistance was snuffed out—all but the tank. The momentum of the miniature space ships carried them far beyond the tank, but they slowed for a return charge. They were going to try to break through its barrier shield.

But the tank did not wait. Suddenly, a bomb exploded on its turret, sending red spirals of gas in all directions. In one instant, the tunnel was filled with red fog, and no one could see. At the same time, those who breathed the red fog passed out.

Janice and David and Ingaborg passed out. Janice's last thought, as she sank helplessly to the ground, was of those curious space ships. Where had they come from? Couldn't be Moon People — not down here. Couldn't be *any* kind of Agarthians. Couldn't be the Golden Guardsmen, either—or *could* they!

Darkness swallowed logic before it could reply, even as she dimly felt rough hands pick her up swiftly and carry her away . . .

When Janice sensed that she was regaining consciousness, she began to reason. She reasoned that she could expect to find herself in either one of three situations. In the first place, she might be awakening in the Hereafter, but on the other hand she did not feel as though she were dead. In the second place, she might be in the hands of the Golden Guardsmen, but her last recollection was that enemy hands had picked her up. In the third place, if the enemy had her, it could only be one particular enemy, *if* he were still alive.

When she dared to open her eyes, she realized that her logic was very valid. For there stood none other than Rothbart, himself!

The man had acquired a more obvious expression of insanity. His hair was long and unkempt. His mad face showed frustration, as though he were not getting his own way anymore or being permitted to appear in public. Or was it fear that the war was not going so well?—that the enemy was closing in?

"So!" he exclaimed, savagely, in German. He seemed huger and more powerful than ever before as he loomed above her where she lay on a luxurious couch. "The Cave Witch has at last been snared! They have denied me much, but they did not dare deny me *this!* You are to be questioned, and after you are questioned — you will be *mine!*" He flicked out a knife and flashed its blade dangerously near her throat. "*Mine!*" he laughed. Then he turned to someone else who lay nearby on another couch in the small, luxuriously appointed chamber. Janice turned and saw that it was Ingaborg. She was lying face down and was sobbing. Ingaborg, the Valkyrie who buried her emotions deep within herself so that men usually did not know whether she loved or hated—she was crying, bitterly.

Rothbart walked over to her and grasped generous handsful of her voluminous, white-golden hair, which was loosened from its braids. His huge fist was buried in it. He jerked up, and her tear streaked face came up with it. Black and blue marks were on her arms.

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"This one," he said, "will be my groveling slave!" Which was really his perverted way of admitting that she, above all others, he could not kill, that he cared for her, not tenderly, but inescapably, like a drug, and was mad at her for it.

Janice's lip curled in disgust. "You raving idiot!" she said, icily. "Why don't you kill us now and get it over with!"

Rothbart sprang at her, in his eyes the glare of an epileptic. His knife flashed before her, wildly. "They want to *question* you first!" he shouted.

In defiantly trying to ignore him, Janice looked across the room and saw Lillian Germain. She sat on a similar couch, elbows on her shapely knees, chin in her palms, watching Janice. She, too, had been manhandled. Her silky hair was down around her shoulders, reaching even to her elbows. The Agarthian robe she wore had been ripped as though in a physical struggle. But there was an absence of dull hopelessness in her eyes. Instead, she seemed to be tensely waiting and expecting to be rescued.

"Lillian!" exclaimed Janice. "Good Lord! How did they capture *you!*"

They captured both Germain and me, but Germain escaped . . ." Lillian looked startled as the figure of one of the Nameless Ones materialized in the middle of the chamber. The latter looked purposefully at Rothbart, and Rothbart's incipient epilepsy passed. He only stood there and glared defiantly at the intruder.

"The time for questioning has arrived," said the Nameless One. "The other prisoner is being brought here." He turned to Janice. In the meantime, Ingaborg looked up in amazement, as she had never seen one of the Nameless Ones before. "You witnessed a full Council session through telepathy," he said to Janice. "We want to know how you passed that information on to Agarthi, and also how much information you gave them."

Just at that moment, a very great commotion was heard outside, as though a pitched battle were being waged. The door suddenly showed a gaping hole in it as a disintegrating gun blasted away at it. Its remnants burst asunder under a battering ram blow of someone's shoulder, and into the room sprang David, bloody sword in one hand and gun in the other. Behind him surged frantic guards, some of them bleeding profusely. When they saw Rothbart and the Nameless One, however, they halted, uncertain.

David ran straight to Janice's side. He knelt on one knee and scooped her into his arms, turning her face to his. "Have they harmed thee?" he asked, fiercely.

"No, David," said Janice, "but don't fight them now! It's hopeless!"

"Not while I live is it hopeless!" he exclaimed, standing up again and facing the others in the room.

"We tried to bring him," explained one of the guards to Rothbart, "but he broke away and came, himself."

David leveled his gun at the Nameless One, which was intended to take in Rothbart, as well. "Release these girls at once," he said, "or ye die

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where ye stand!"

To David's great puzzlement, however, the man in the dress suit, who wore a monocle in his right eye, addressed him with an overwhelming self-assurance. "The young ladies," he said, icily, "will be left to the pleasure of our red-headed friend here just as soon as this 'Cave Witch' has answered some important questions. Your own presence here is required because it is probable that if we torture you in the girl's presence it might serve to loosen her tongue."

David was too disconcerted by the other's mysterious attitude to smile his usual smile of defiance. But he was angered beyond the limits of self-control. His great sword suddenly swept through the air at the Nameless One, cleaving him from head to torso, or so it seemed. But nothing happened. He remained quite whole, and there was no blood.

David stood there and looked foolishly at his sword, then at the Nameless One, uncomprehendingly.

"David!" cried Janice. "That's only a mental image before you! Don't waste your energy!"

"And the red-haired one?" queried David, raising his gun and training it on Rothbart.

Rothbart would have hurled his knife at David's throat had not a thin ray of light emanated from the Nameless One's head and found its way to the young Agarthian. The latter dropped to the floor as if a truck had hit him.

Ingaborg sat bolt upright and stared from David to the Nameless One, her eyes filled with fright for the first time in her adult existence. Lillian recognized this display of strange powers as a potential threat to her husband, and she was worried.

"I only jolted him," said the Nameless One to the guards. "He'll regain consciousness immediately. Pick him up and apply the shin breaker."

Janice wondered if she should feel relieved that David was not dead, in view of the ordeal to come. She did not love him, really, but she was very deeply fond of him. He was, to her, like a younger brother. When she saw them tie him to a chair and apply a cruel brace to his legs that was designed to break his shins when screwed together, she felt that she would have to talk. She thought quickly. Perhaps Agarthi had not yet made full use of the information she had given them through her microtelepathy. If she told everything, perhaps the enemy would yet find a way of hiding those individuals who were wanted by Agarthi. But six months had passed. The information surely could no longer be of value.

Suddenly, she wondered why they had to question her at all. Why could they not use telepathy on her and pump out all the information they wanted? It was then that she noticed a very faint buzzing sound in her head, and she realized a startling fact. *The microtelepathy was shielding her mind from ordinary telepathy analysis!* Therefore, Agarthi did consider the contents of her mind as being too valuable for revelation!

She thought of the paralysis beam just as the guards gave the first turn

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to the screws on David's legs. He awoke at that moment and looked at her.

The guards around him began to stiffen with paralysis as Janice concentrated on them. This included Rothbart, and David, himself.

"Stop!" said the Nameless One, who remained unaffected. "Or I will be forced to kill you!"

So Janice released the guards from the paralysis, and they looked at her fearfully, with the full conviction that she was some awesomely endowed sorceress. However, at a command from the Nameless One they gave the screws another turn on David's legs and his face broke out in running sweat. But he said nothing.

"Oh David!" cried Janice, pityingly. Being free, she ran to him and threw her arms around his neck, involuntarily kissing his cheek. Then she turned to the Nameless One. "I'll talk!" she said, with tears in her eyes. "But release his legs!"

Outside the room a tiny spaceship landed on the floor. The guards before it fell dead. Out of the ship stepped tiny men only two inches high, clad in brilliant golden armor. All the little men stood still, as though listening to orders over their electronophones. A deep purplish ball of light seemed to consume each one. As it did, the ball increased rapidly in size until it was the size of a normal man. Dimly within the spheres of light the men could be seen growing to normal size, in the process of returning to normal density.

The purplish globes winked out and Steve Rockner motioned to his companions. Four of them walked forward, the door of the chamber burst open, and Rocky and his men marched into the room.

Even the Nameless One, not to mention Rothbart, Lillian, Ingaborg, David, the German guards — and Janice—was astounded to see the four Golden Guardsmen suddenly appear in the room. For a moment, everybody was paralyzed with surprise.

"Keep your shields on, boys!" said Rocky to his men.

Lillian Germain's eyes lighted with recognition. "The Golden Guardsmen!" she exclaimed.

Janice straightened up slowly beside David, her blue-green eyes wide and incredulous, fixed immovably on Rocky.

"Hello, Janice," he said.

"Rocky!" she cried out, and she threw her arms around his neck. "Oh, Rocky, I've waited so long!"

Rocky saw David staring at him in dark resentment, so he removed Janice's arms from his neck. "I know it's been too long," he said, "and I don't blame you, kid. Anyway, you and your boy friend will be all right now. We're getting you out of here."

Janice looked amazed, confused, and speechless.

"Rocky look out!" This was from Lillian.

Rocky and his three companions fired simultaneously at the Nameless One as the latter sent out his ray of death, full force, at Rocky's head. Rothbart jumped, pale faced, to one side, as a gaping hole appeared in the wall beside him.

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But the Nameless One remained intact, much to the Guardsmen's astonishment. And to the Nameless One's great surprise, Rocky also remained intact.

"Sorry, Houdini," said Rocky, though he was greatly puzzled by the other's immunity. "You've never seen this kind of a shield before. This is Agarthi talking. Just fold up your bag of tricks and take a back seat. These girls are going with us—young Galahad, too." He pointed to David. The nickname was a subtle reminder to Janice of the hardships he and she had been through together. Sarcastically, she had called *him* Galahad then.

David could only fume and watch Janice and Rocky in silence.

"Rocky!" cried Janice, desperately. "You don't understand! You've got to—"

The Nameless One suddenly disappeared, but as he did so everyone distinctly heard a snarling sort of laugh, and for a moment the room dimmed as though filled with an ominous shadow of indescribable Evil.

Then the earth shook violently, and several stones fell from the ceiling.

By this time, one of the Guardsmen had released David, and he lost no time getting into action. At once, he sprang for Rothbart.

Precisely at that moment, Rothbart raised his fist and exposed a brilliant glass ring, in sight of all. Before David could reach him, the ring suddenly flashed with a brilliance that shot needles of pain into everyone's eyes, blinding them. David groped for Rothbart and felt a knife cut sickeningly into his left shoulder. But quickly he caught the knife hand and twisted it. There was a howl of anguish. David took the knife. A fist caught him in the face, staggering him. But he lunged forward with the knife. It bit into flesh and ripped. Another howl. Then David received a rabbit punch at the base of his brain, and he passed out.

Rothbart, gravely wounded, managed to escape . . .

In a few moments, everybody was able to see again. The German guards were gone. The only ones remaining in the room were Janice, Lillian, Ingaborg, David, Rocky, and the other three Guardsmen. David was sitting up, rubbing his neck.

"You boys take over," said Rocky. "I've got to find Germain."

Now it was Lillian's turn to rush to Rocky. "Have you seen him?" she asked, anxiously.

"Yes, Lillian, he's all right," answered Rocky. "It's just that he's awful worried about something new that's come up. He's goin' up to see the fleet commander and to call the King."

"The *King!*"

"Yeah. An' we've got to high tail it out of here, pronto. Think it's got something to do with these earthquakes." He turned to his men. "You get 'em all out of here fast," he said. "I've got other work to do."

With that, he turned and disappeared from sight.

"Rocky!" cried Janice. "Rocky! Come back!"

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But Rocky had definitely left. David touched Janice's arm. His shoulder was bleeding. Janice turned to him, then threw herself on him, sobbing so bitterly that Ingaborg and Lillian had to get up and come over to console her.

"Come on, everybody!" said one of the Guardsmen who introduced himself as Kent, and his companions as Turner, Brion and Stierman. "Let's scram out of here!"

Kent, being a lifetime acquaintance, was like "home" to Lillian. Seeing him now was a kind of emotional salvation to her. Her eyes glistened wetly as she smiled and squeezed his hand, while the Golden Guardsmen shook hands with the Agarthian spacemen and Janice and Ingaborg and David introduced themselves to Brion, Turner and Stierman.

"Stephen is all right," Kent said, "but we all seem to be in some sort of very grave danger. We must get out of here at once. Stephen has gone to advise the fleet commander of Eidelmann's atom bomb ship, and he is also going to call the King."

"Atom bomb ship?" Lillian raised her perfect brows in questioning concern. Behind her, Stierman was explaining the story to Janice, David and Ingaborg, and the spacemen were briefing the Guardsmen. Everybody was talking at once.

"Yes, Lil," said Kent. "Eidelmann and Von Immerschoen are going to try to bomb Agarthi with a remote controlled space ship full of atomic bombs. We've *got* to stop them!"

The earth shook under their feet, and everybody looked at each other in alarm.

"Say, these earthquakes are getting to be a habit!" said Ingaborg.

"That's what concerns Stephen, I'm sure," said Lillian to Kent. "Oh Michael, I'm scared to death!"

"Look!" said Stierman to everybody. "We've got to trace down Von Immerschoen, Eidelmann, and Rothbart. I think they all went the same way. This trail of blood leading into this passage is Rothbart's. It's a give away, and we've got to follow it. I'll take Brion and Turner and a couple of spacemen with me."

At that moment, they all heard soldiers running. There were many soldiers coming up the tunnel toward them, and by the words they shouted everybody knew they were Germans. David surprisingly took over. He drew his sword and brandished his gun, at the same time admonishing everyone to silence.

"Quickly!" he exclaimed. "Into that narrow passage! They will think we have already passed to the elevator. Those are A-1 troops and there are many of them!"

No one could refute his argument. Stierman looked at Brion and Turner and Kent. They and the spacemen and the Golden Guardsmen nodded in agreement. They all started into the passage, single file. The Golden Guardsmen asserted their authority by insisting that everyone go ahead of them, on the basis of the fact that they were the most adequately armed and protected. David led the procession into the passage. Behind followed the spacemen, then Stierman,

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Brion, Turner, Kent, Ingaborg, Lillian and Janice, followed by the Golden Guardsmen.

Before the last Guardsman could squeeze into the passage, however, the Germans rounded a curve in the tunnel. The leading officers carried disintegrator guns and they fired immediately. Thanks to the Guardsman's shield, he was unharmed. He stood there and played both paralysis beam and disintegrator gunfire over the oncharging men, although with a wry expression on his tanned, Yankee countenance. The Germans disappeared like broken soap bubbles under the fire, and those on the sidelines fell stiffly down, eyes staring, paralyzed. But many more men came, firing radium pistols. The concussions of the radium bullet explosions around him almost knocked the Guardsman out, in spite of his tough screen, so he finally gave up and ran swiftly into the passage after the others.

David turned a sharp corner in the passage and came to a blank wall. Knowing that it was some kind of a door, he borrowed a gun from the spaceman behind him and aimed it, along with his own gun, at the obstacle. When he pulled the triggers, the door glowed, then popped into nothingness.

Beyond lay a dimly lighted grav sled dock. It was a large room, like a garage. Beyond this was a smooth grav sled way, leading downward and northward.

"Hurry!" someone shouted behind him. They could all hear the Germans shouting as they pursued them into the passageway.

A grav sled can comfortably seat six normal people. In their group were sixteen. Six each piled in the first two sleds, and four into the third. This left two empty sleds.

An Agarthian spaceman occupied the driver's seat of each sled, in order to save time explaining to others how to drive them. Within sixty seconds of discovering the sleds, they were off down the dim way that led to an unknown destination.

"We should have destroyed those remaining sleds!" said Janice to Ingaborg, both of whom were together in the last sled with one Guardsman and a spaceman.

"Too late now!" said the Guardsman. "Wow! Look at us go!"

The sleds floated six inches above a white line that led straight down the way. They were doing close to one hundred and fifty miles per hour.

"Pretty fast," said Ingaborg, "when we don't know what may be ahead."

"My father is ahead of us," said Janice, pensively. "And Eidelmann, and Rothbart, and the atom ship."

"Here come the Germans!" exclaimed the Guardsman.

The girls looked behind them and saw a single headlight on a distant grav sled. It was gaining on them.

"Faster!" cried Janice, even as the sled lurched forward with new speed.

The Guardsman took careful aim with his gun. "I hope this hits them," he said, "because if they use *their* guns, you're goners! My screen only protects myself!"

Just then the sled swayed dangerously, and the Guardsman almost fell

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out. "Hey!" he shouted to the spaceman.

"It's an earthquake," said the driver.

"Do you know where we should be about now?" said Ingaborg. *"Under the North Seal"*

The earth continued to shake, and the hurtling grav sleds continued to swerve dangerously near the walls of the tunnel . . .

The earth had begun to shake more violently. In the cities and towns and villages of the world, people ran in instinctive terror into the open and looked at each other questioningly. Many of them had experienced earthquakes before, but none which kept repeating themselves persistently every half hour or so, and in an ever increasing crescendo. In the wilderness, wild men and animals howled or beat their chests or fought with one another. And Mankind, in general, was already asking itself—Is this the end of the world?

The Agarthian fleet had just completed formation in a giant circle out in space. At five hundred miles of altitude, the Earth looked more beautiful than at any other height. The ocean of the planet's atmosphere looked like a clearly defined body of attenuated, silvery liquid, as far as the Kenniston Heavyside layer. From there on up the very thin air was like a pale, zodiacal light. Beneath the faintly silvery sea, far below, were continents, seas and clouds, outlined softly in delicate pastels ranging from whitish blue to lavender. Above and all around was the black dome of Eternity, with the near and distant suns and nebulae gleaming in various brightnesses, as though they formed some colossal maze of fantastic coral in a deep sea of dreams, the nearer banks of stars standing out in familiar relief, and the more distant jagged star-walls fading gigantically away into endless and forbidding depths, shadowed by the vague shapes of dark nebulae out there in the incalculable distances.

Most of the crews in the Agarthian ships were getting their second glimpse of this awe-inspiring sight, but the Golden Guardsmen who had joined the fleet in this last moment were getting their first view of the indescribable wonders of outer space. The Guardsmen occupied three ships. Within each ship was a special unit which could generate Dr. Borg's densifying waves. With this it was possible to increase or decrease the relative density of each Guardsman's ship and everything and everybody in it. At present, the ships were at normal density and therefore of normal size. They were smaller than the regular fleet ships and only carried two hundred men, but they were sleeker and faster and packed a deadly punch.

Steve Rockner had just passed over to the flagship in a commuter vessel to see Germain. (He could have seen him by televisor, but he wanted an excuse to use the commuter, as he could not suppress his enthusiasm for space flight). Principally, he wanted to check up on Janice's group to see if they had arrived, as some commuters were still coming up from the city below. He had just reached

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the bridge of the flagship when the commander and the ship's captain cried out in alarm, pointing into the electrovisiscope that showed the earth below. Rocky also saw the thing happen . . .

Near Berlin, over an area that was more than five miles in diameter, the earth exploded. Rocks, earth and debris shot upward into the stratosphere. Out of the gaping hole came a gigantic, blue shaft of light, like a titanic bolt of destructive energy, and everybody observed concentric, silvery blue walls of concussion or sound waves march across Europe from the center of the disturbance.

Then the ship emerged.

It was a huge purple globe a half-mile in diameter. It was a ship such as the Elder Gods, themselves, might have used. And it was very ancient, as was evidenced by the glistening patina of iridescent earth substances which had become a part of its hull, as though it had lain buried since eons before the Flood.

Without hesitation, it came hurtling straight up at them.

Rocky's eyes bugged out as he watched it. "Holy jumpin' Jehosephat!" he yelled. "What in the hell is *that?*"

"It is Satanus," said the commander. He barked into the televisor. "All units close up the circle and converge fire on that ship when it reaches four hundred miles!" he said.

"Satanus!" exclaimed Rocky. "What d'you mean?"

"*Satan*—Beelzebub—the Devil!" said the commander.

"You mean—that's Old Nick? Who d'you think you're kidding!"

The commander glared at him. "You had better order your own units to maneuver and fire with us at this enemy," he said. "All our forces combined may not be sufficient to handle him. That is why Germain is calling the King."

Rocky gulped and looked at the ominous looking ship as it hurtled ever more rapidly upward at them. He grabbed the controls of the televisor.

"Guardsmen!" he shouted. "This is Rockner. Men, close in with the fleet and when they fire at that big ship coming up, fire with everything you've got! And keep your shields primed high!"

Although only sixty seconds had passed since the appearance of the Demon's ship, it was now in their midst, firing. The Agarthian ships closed in, along with the three Guardsman vessels, concentrating all their heat rays and disintegrating fire on the big, enemy ship.

As they did so, it was as though the universe exploded back at them. Much to the chagrin of the Agarthians and to the great astonishment of Rocky, *ten* Agarthian ships flashed blindingly into extinction.

Very definitely, it was established that that single, gigantic ship was more than a match for all of them. On board the still intact flagship, however, Dr. Grange had met Dr. Borg. The two of them had found a common bond between them in an instant. When this unusual attack was made, the two men retired to Borg's

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private laboratory, installed on board, and they put their heads together. Grange had an idea, and Borg liked it . . .

Satan's ship passed beyond the remainder of the Agarthian fleet, moving out over the North Sea. Gingerly, they closed slowly in toward him. He stationed himself in space, about seven hundred miles out, and then addressed them through the televisors. No one saw his face. The screens remained blank as he spoke. And never had such arrogance been heard by mortal men.

"BEFORE THE SO-CALLED 'ELDER GODS' CAME TO EARTH," he said, in a booming, evilly vibrant voice, "I WAS ITS MASTER. EARTH WAS MY KINGDOM, AND I WAS ITS PRINCE. YOUR YELLOW-LIVERED 'KING OF THE WORLD,' AND YOUR PRECOCIOUS STEPHEN GERMAIN, ARE ARROGANT FOOLS TO PRESUME TO TRIFLE WITH ME! YE SEEK TO DRIVE ME FROM THE EARTH. VERY WELL! IF YE WOULD MAKE IT UNTENABLE FOR ME, SO SHALL I ALSO MAKE IT UNTENABLE FOR YE! I SHALL DESTROY IT! EVEN NOW IT TREMBLES AND CRACKS AND BELCHES OUT THE WARNING SMOKE OF THE FIRE AND BRIMSTONE THAT ARE TO COME! TREMBLE, YE SOFT GRUBS, YE WORMS OF THE EARTH! GROVEL IN THE CLAY THAT BEGAT YE! AND RETURN TO ASHES! EARTH IS BUT A MOTE LOST IN INFINITY. THERE ARE MYRIADS OF OTHER AND GRANDER WORLDS. YEA! WORLDS OF SURGENT EVIL, AS YE CALL IT, WHERE OTHERS SHALL CALL ME PRINCE!" He laughed, as only *he* could laugh, so that the listeners' flesh crept in instinctive terror. "MY AMUSING LITTLE FLEA, STEPHEN GERMAIN, WILL BE PLEASED TO SEE WHAT SHALL NOW BE REVEALED TO HIM!"

At that moment, Germain's mind was filled with a vision of his wife and the rest who accompanied her on the grav sleds, directly underneath the deepest part of the North Sea. And at the same instant he saw in the electrovisiscope before him a gigantic ray dart down from Satan's ship toward the North Sea.

"No!" Germain cried out, but it was a voice lost in cataclysm.

The bottom of the sea was pierced by the ray. The cold waters began to rush into the endless caverns and tunnels of the Agarthians. In the North Sea, a maelstrom was seen to form.

When Germain ran back onto the bridge of the flagship, the commander grasped him, frantically. "The King!" he cried. "Where is the King?"

"I cannot contact him," said Germain, and he grabbed Rocky by the arm. "Rocky!" he said. "Do you know where Janice Maine is?"

"No," said Rocky. "I suppose with her boyfriend on one of these ships. I left orders with my men to—"

"She is with my wife on a grav

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sled in a tunnel beneath the North Sea! Have you seen the North Sea?" He pointed toward the electrovisiscope.

Rocky had seen. His face paled, then it hardened. "Do you think the water is entering their tunnel?" he asked.

"I know it is!" said Germain. "Rocky, quick, for the love of God! Your own special ships are the only ones equipped to save them, if there is still time!"

"I'm going," said Rocky.

"God help you!" said Germain. "And Lil, and Janice, and Kent, and all the rest down there!" He turned to the commander. "I'd give a limb if I could go with him, but there's more at stake up here than any personal human concern. I'll try to contact the King again!"

Rocky, back in his own ship, gave orders to the other two ships to stay with the twenty-eight vessels that remained of the fleet. His own ship he ordered to dive directly into the North Sea—directly at the maelstrom, a gaping whirlpool that measured five hundred feet in diameter.

As the ship plunged toward the sea, it was surrounded by a purplish ball of light. This ball appeared to contract, and as it did, so did the ship. Its density increased, and therefore it grew smaller. For only under a condition of high relative density would it be able to withstand the terrible pressures of the ocean depths . . .

The first intimation that David and the rest of his companions had of the catacylsm was when a sound wave came hurtling down on them that nearly broke their eardrums. The sleds all slowed down sharply, and before they knew it, two grav sleds full of Germans were wedged in beside them. The latter had been unable to brake their momentum in time.

There was no conflict. In that same instant, everybody including the enemy became aware of the fact that death faced them all, indiscriminately. For they heard the roar of the waters and felt the slowly rising pressure of the air as the sea compressed it faster than it could get out of the tunnel.

"The earthquake cracked open the sea bottom" shouted Brion. "The ocean's coming through the ceiling!"

"Good God!" Kent groaned. "Quick! Fire at the walls and roof in front of us! The cave-in may block the water!"

They tried, but not enough disintegrator guns could be brought to bear on the hard rock of the ancient ceiling to open it up. There was no more time. Ice cold seawater gushed over their sleds and squirted irresistibly down the tunnel behind them. The Germans cried out in terror. Some prayed, and some called out the names of loved ones back home.

"Lillian!" It was Kent. Lillian had been washed back into the last sled with Janice and Ingaborg, and so he allowed himself to be washed back there also. And he clung to it, and to her. The rising tide was almost around their necks.

"Oh Michael!" exclaimed Lillian. "God help Stephen!"

"It's the end, Lil, honey!"

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David came splashing back toward Janice. He did not know how to swim, nor did it matter. The water and the pressure were rising. They were more than a mile below sea level. The pressure would rise eventually to three thousand pounds per square inch, and they would be shreds of carrion for the surviving deep sea fish which they saw and felt squirming all about them, some with sparkling, phosporescent lights. In front, somebody was blazing away with a disintegrator gun at a cluster of large squids that had piled up on the first sled.

David braced himself in Janice's sled and put a powerful arm around her in a futile gesture of protection. Beside him were Lillian and Kent. Close to Janice was Ingaborg. The two girls looked at each other. In the next instant they were together against David's massive young chest, sobbing. Janice thought of Rocky, lost now forever, as was Ingaborg's Sir William. This was cold death, horrible and painful. Death—roaring, crushing, titanic and final.

Heads swayed on limp necks under black tons of water.

The last vision David had before he lost consciousness was of three mermaids, their perfect faces drifting before him as though in a dream, eyes closed, their long hair intermingling like waving moss, some of it coppery red, some of it white with a glint of gold, and some raven black, like the cloak of Death, itself.

The last thing Kent saw was a purplish light glowing in the water around him. Globes of this light seemed to encircle him and Lillian. Over his head he thought he saw a shark, or a torpedo, hovering in the black flood. Or was it a miniature space ship? He knew that this was the delirium that preceded death. A space ship, in this tunnel, at the bottom of a maelstrom? To make it more ridiculous, the ship seemed to be getting larger. Or was *he* getting smaller? The killing, rising temperature suddenly seemed to be abating. Incongruously, Kent laughed, and then passed out as water entered his lungs . . .

For the Guardsman ship to perform the rescue was simpler by far than anyone had imagined. Relative densification was the reason. Although the ship acquired the relatively small size of a torpedo, it retained its same weight, mass and inertia but did not offer a large surface area for the maelstrom to work on. Therefore, it entered the great whirlpool under perfect control. It also entered the broken grav sled tunnel under complete control, because here only a fraction of the runaway ocean water was encountered (the major portion flowed into a vast series of deep caves). Through the use of "sound vision," infra-red devices, and penetrovisiray, the grav sleds and their human cargos were precisely located. All the victims were relatively densified at once and drawn to the ship by means of traction beams. Being relatively densified, the pounds per square inch pressure was minimized, because on each diminutive body there were not many square inches against which pressure could be exerted. Moreover,

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the bodies, in this condition, were harder than rock.

The only serious problem was suffocation, from two causes. One, from drowning, and the other, from inability to breathe normal air if it were available. Rocky, himself, worked out the solution.

In the very top of the tunnel there was a thin stratum of air which was highly compressed, at about two hundred atmospheres. This was roughly the density of air required for them to breathe. The ship turned its disintegrator rays upward and carved itself a small cave, just large enough to rise into. In the cave, the compressed air accumulated. Then it became easy for Guardsmen to come outside and pick the bodies off the hull which were held there by the traction beams. They moved them inside, applied artificial respiration and administered stimulator rays, and from there on it was a mere matter of convalescence. Five Germans, two spacemen and one Guardsman drowned, however. And Janice was very weak, as well as Kent and David. Janice remained in a coma, as did David. They had taken in too much water. But it was evident that they would both live, which was fortunate for them, Rocky reflected. He, himself, had picked them off the hull—entwined in each other's arms . . .

It was Stierman who told Rocky about the atom bomb ship. When they emerged from the maelstrom and the Guardsman ship reverted to normal size and density, they turned toward Norway, traveling at an altitude of seventy miles. No sooner had they passed over Oslo than they saw what they were after.

The atom bomb ship rose slowly, at first, on a prescribed arc, to approximately fifty miles of altitude. Then it straightened out toward Agarthi and gathered speed. Rocky sent a warning message to his other ships and to the fleet, and took out after the remote controlled vessel. By the time he had gingerly made a close enough approach to use traction beams on it, seven other vessels arrived, including the other two Guardsman ships. After a concentration of traction beams, the death ship was slowed down and stopped. Guardsmen dressed in hermetically sealed, electrically heated space suits went aboard her and destroyed the remote control mechanism. Then Rocky gave orders.

One of his ships he dispatched to capture Von Immerschoen, Rothbart, and Eidelmann. The rest he requested to return to the fleet. He then took over the atom bomb ship and piloted it upward, himself, toward the area of operations. His own ship he sent to the fleet's flagship for transference of the maelstrom survivors to more comfortable quarters.

The fleet commander called him on the televisor. "Why are you bringing that thing up here?" he asked.

"Maybe we can *use* it," suggested Rocky, not without laconic inflections.

For a moment, the face of the commander darkened on the screen. Then he suddenly smiled. "You may be right!" he said. "Bring it along! But

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keep it at a good distance from the main fleet. Satan may blow it up, himself."

"This tub has meteor screens and guard shields," replied Rocky. "I have them turned on full."

"How do you know Eidelmann isn't going to set off the bombs, anyway, and blow you to blazes?"

"We destroyed all the remote control devices he installed."

"But he may have provided for delayed action firing, just in case the ship was captured."

"That would be such a shock," said Rocky, "that I don't believe I'd ever recover from it."

"Don't be facetious, Rockner! You are in very great danger!"

"So what! We have no means of running this tub by remote control. If we have to use it against Old Nick out there, that will call for a suicide pilot. Mind if I volunteer?" Rocky was thinking of a coppery haired girl who had kissed a certain good-looking young fellow, with tears in her eyes, and who was later found with her arms around that same fellow when they were rescued from the maelstrom. Life suddenly looked cheap to him. The only thing that was left was one weakness. He loved a fight. It was not every day you got a chance to punch the Devil in the nose with a boatload of atomic bombs. It would be a glorious finish.

But the commander's brows raised in astonishment. He turned pale, then red with impatience. "What are you talking about, Rockner!" he said. "You are far too valuable to us to—"

"*All* of us," interrupted Rocky, "are equal."

"Fine!" said the commander, triumphantly. "If that's the case, then we're *all* volunteers! As supreme commander of the Agarthian space navy —of which you Guardsmen are only a task force unit—I reserve the prerogative of selecting the necessary pilot of that animated atomic bomb you're driving—*if* we have to use it! I hereby order you to take command of your own ship and your own unit. Just bring that bomb ship to our own level and lock it at neutral. We'll compensate for space drift by tugging it with traction beams every once in a while, just to keep it handy."

Reluctantly, Rocky did as he was ordered, and the death ship soon hung in space near the fleet—pilotless, waiting for an appointed "volunteer" to take it plunging to extinction . . .

Dr. Borg advised the fleet commander that he was of the opinion that the cause of the very alarming series of earthquakes on Earth was some automatic device which Satan had left operating in some hidden location known only to him.

"There are no such things as magic and miracles," he said. "Every effect must have a cause. Satan announced that he was going to destroy the world. Now he is doing it. It can only mean that he has placed some unusual device in operation. It may be that he knows how to tap some source of power which is unknown to us, which is perhaps even superior to and more efficient than atomic energy. You are no doubt familiar with the illustration of the principle of

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sympathetic vibration which is given in most high school textbooks on physics, of the dog who trotted across a long bridge and knocked it down. Perhaps Satan's machine is based on the principle of sympathetic vibrations. Gigantic surges of energy in the form of slow shock waves, permeating the entire Earth, in rhythmic succession. I have had the periods of the quakes checked. They come every twenty-nine minutes and last sixty seconds. But now each time they occur they are more severe. I calculate that if these cycles are allowed to continue, in forty-eight hours the earth tremors will be greater than anything previously recorded by the science of seismology. Within a few hours, tidal waves should also start building up. Unless we can locate that machine and destroy it, it will destroy the world, or at least most of the human, animal and vegetable life on Earth, within three or four days. Even during the next eighteen hours I should say that between five and ten per cent of the Earth's population will be killed."

"The only thing I can do," said the commander, "is to send a shipload of technicians to try to locate the machine and destroy it."

"But even with penetrovisirays it will be like looking for a needle in a hay stack," said Borg. "I believe a minimum of three ships is necessary. They must analyze the shock waves for direction and locate their source by triangulation."

"But, by the Sword, man! I can't *spare* three ships!"

"Nor is the Earth, itself, expendable," countered Borg. "You've got to spare the ships, or better yet, transfer the necessary equipment to commuter vessels."

"That's it!" said the commander. "I'll have it done immediately!" He turned to the ship's captain and gave orders.

"One more thing," said Borg, his left eye twitching as usual. "Dr. Grange, of the United States Government, has made a remarkable contribution to our cause, but you may not like the first part of it."

"Any help is welcome," replied the commander quickly. "What is it?"

"He has discovered that for us to fire at Satan's ship would be to fire at ourselves. You must not fire at him."

"What!" cried the commander. "That's impossible! Explain yourself, quickly, because at any moment the hostilities may begin again!"

"Satan knows how to harness and utilize all the ray energy you send him," said Borg. "Not only is he able to reflect it all back to its source, but it comes back amplified. It's jiu jitsu applied to ray warfare. That's why we lost ten ships a little while ago."

The commander paled, then brightened with a new thought. "You intimate that there are two phases of Dr. Grange's discovery. What is the second phase?"

"We're working on that," said Borg. "It's a ray diffracting apparatus. Grange was quick to observe that our rays are generated in straight beams, which was an intentional provision of its ancient inventors, because it was originally intended that

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the intensity be equal in any cross-section of a ray, throughout its extension. That is why Satan is able to throw the rays back at us and, through the process of amplification, cause them to penetrate our own guard screens. Now Grange has quite brilliantly pointed out that by *diffracting* our rays so that they can be made to come to a focal point at the target, we can not only increase our own concentration but also make it impossible for our own rays to harm us if thrown back. For after they pass the focal point they diverge, and their cross-sectional area grows larger, thus more attenuated."

"Wonderful!" enthused the commander. "How much of a job will it be to make and apply the diffraction equipment?"

"It consists of a simple device based on the principle of magnetic diffraction," replied Borg. "We have already produced some. Each ship can make its own. I'll explain over the televisor how to do it. To make enough for all heat and disintegrator rays will take six to eight hours. In the meantime, you'll have to make strategic retreats until you are ready."

"That's a long time," said the commander, "but at least we have a chance! Please begin at once!"

So Borg did. And within a half hour there was not a ship in the fleet, including the Guardsman destroyers, that had not started on the project with enthusiasm. Grange was sent around in the company of several Agarthian technicians on a tour of inspection and instruction.

In the meantime, the Guardsman ship assigned to Norway had returned from its brief campaign. The spaceship dock had been captured. Von Immerschoen was on board, a prisoner, but neither Rothbart nor Eidelmann had been located. Von Immerschoen was morose and uncommunicative, and the simple orders were to keep him in custody until he could be taken to Agarthi for trial, along with his whole group of cartel Council members, most of whom now languished in Agarthian prisons.

Germain was with his wife when action came again. Lillian had recuperated sufficiently from her experience to sit up in bed. Janice and David were still in a coma, but their condition was improving, according to physicians who were watching brain-wave visigraphs on both of them. Kent and the rest had gotten up and moving about, including Ingaborg.

Germain's dark eyes looked approvingly at Lillian's face, which had regained its usual glow of health. He squeezed her hand. "I'm a fine hero," he said. "Twice I've sent Rocky to rescue you when every cell in my body cried out that I should go, myself."

"But you did as I wanted you to do, darling," she said. "Always remember that *you* are more important than *us*. The world needs you first."

"I'm not doing so hot," said Germain. "I can't contact the King no matter what method I use, and I can't understand why he does not answer."

Lillian and the rest had become fully aware of the current situation

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through freshly recorded and broadcast television reports. She looked frightened. "Stephen," she said, "you don't suppose Satan could have—"

"No," he interrupted, reading her thought. "The King is immortal. Even Satan couldn't kill him."

At that moment, the televisor beside Lillian's bed came to life. Its screen was blank, but its loudspeaker became vibrant with the arrogant, superhumanly powerful voice of Satan, himself. Lillian threw herself into Germain's willing arms, in irrepressible terror, as the two listened in amazement.

"I MUST CONFESS," said Satan, "THAT IT IS A PITY YE ARE NOT DISCIPLES OF THE NEGATIVE POLE, THAT YE ARE NOT DESTINED TO ENJOY THAT REGENERATIVE ENERGY WHICH YE CALL EVIL, THAT YE WILL NOT CALL ME PRINCE. FOR YE ARE CLEVER. YE HAVE SAVED THOSE WHOM I SOUGHT TO DROWN IN THE MAELSTROM. YE CANNOT BE TERRORIZED INTO THE HYSTERIA THAT IS SUPERSTITION. YE DO NOT BELIEVE IN MAGIC OR MIRACLES. YE SEEK TO DISCOVER AND DESTROY MY SHOCK WAVE GENERATOR ON EARTH. YE ARE EVEN NOW PREPARING A COUNTER WEAPON AGAINST ME, WHICH HAS GREAT MERIT. UNFORTUNATELY, HOWEVER, I CANNOT WAIT UNTIL YE ARE READY TO USE IT. I WOULD DESTROY YE *NOW!*

"STILL, SATAN IS A GAMBLER, A BARGAINER. IF YE WILL ACCEDE TO ONE DEMAND, I SHALL DEPART FROM HERE FOREVER, WITHOUT DESTROYING YE, IN WHICH CASE YE'D STILL HAVE OPPORTUNITY TO FIND MY SHOCK WAVE GENERATOR AND SAVE THE EARTH—PERHAPS!

"MY SINGLE DEMAND IS THIS: *SEND ME STEPHEN GERMAIN!"*

Lillian and Germain looked at each other for a long time, Germain easily reading his wife's thoughts, she trying desperately to read his by his expression.

"That sort of puts your theory to the acid test," said Germain. "If I am more important to the world than I am to myself, I'd better give myself up. It would save the fleet and give them a chance to save the world. On the other hand, if Satan attacks us now he can destroy us. And the world will die, because the special commuter ships which are to locate Satan's machine have not yet been fully equipped to leave for the Earth. They, too, would be destroyed. Latest reports say that tidal waves are beginning to threaten hundreds of Pacific and Atlantic seaports. Volcanos are aflame with flowing lava on every continent, and the Earth, itself, is cracking. What does logic tell you, Lil?"

Lillian's blue-green eyes filled up with tears. Her full, trembling lips came toward his. She kissed him and clung to him, then pressed her perfect face against his cheek. "Oh darling, there is no more logic in me!

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My heart speaks louder than my mind! How can I say that you should yield yourself to the Father of Evil—even for our sake? Better death for all!"

"You know you're wrong, Lil. I should go."

At that moment, the fleet commander and the ship's captain, accompanied by Kent, Ingaborg, Brion, Turner and Stierman, burst into the room.

"Germain!" said the commander. "Don't be rash! We are behind you. We have twenty converted disintegrator guns in the fleet already and we may be able to resist the fiend!"

Lillian looked hopefully at her husband.

"I am just one individual," replied Germain, calmly, "and an entire world is at stake. Do you propose to risk the lives of four billions of human beings for the sake of one man? Don't be absurd! Of course I'll go. In fact, I am greatly flattered that such an enemy considers me to be worth the ransom of the world!"

Lillian clung to him like a drowning person. She kissed him and she cried, "Don't!" she said. "Don't go, darling! Not to *him!*"

Germain kissed his wife, then rose to his feet. "Why not?" he said, coldly, his eyes piercingly bright, glaring at each one present.

And no one could give him answer . . .

Suddenly, however, everyone in that room stiffened with the shock of surprise as the televisor blared again, but with a different voice, fully as superhuman and stentorian as Satan's own . . .

"HEAR ME, O CARRION EATER OF THE PIT!" (The voice was addressing Satan!) "NEITHER SHALL YOU DESTROY THE EARTH, NOR MY FLEET, NOR SHALL YOU HAVE STEPHEN GERMAIN! YOU WOULD USE HIS BODY AND MIND AS A MASK FOR YOUR OWN DARK SOUL IN OTHER WORLDS, TO DEFRAUD OTHER POSITIVE RACES AND BEND THEM TO THE NEGATIVE POLE OF EVIL! BUT KNOW YOU NOW THAT YOUR PLANS ARE AT AN END! FOR I AM YOUR ENEMY, AND I BRING YOU—*DEATH!*"

The face of an Agarthian observer flashed on the screen. "The King!" he shouted. "He comes in a wondrous ship! Look!" And the screen was filled with a view of the electrovisiscope, wherein all present could see, to their great wonderment and surprise, a vast ship, larger even than Satan's, hurtling faster by far than a high velocity shell across the top of the Earth's silvery screen of atmosphere, straight at Satan's vessel. It, too, was covered with the iridescent earth patina deposited on the hull in the passage of incalculable time, for it was fully as ancient as the other. No Agarthian had ever laid eyes on it before.

"The King!" was all that anyone could exclaim at that moment, except for the commander.

He said, "Quick! We must follow him up and use all of our altered disintegrator guns!"

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When the others had left the room, Lillian grasped Germain's hand, pulling him back to her bedside. He looked at her, then took her in his arms. He kissed her tenderly, and she sobbed, "Thank God, darling! Thank God!"

"Sire!" cried a voice over the televisor, addressing the King. "Do not fire upon Satan! He will throw your own rays back—amplified!"

After a moment, old Mandir's voice replied from the King's ship. "He will not throw back what we shall give him." Then, after another moment, Mandir said, "Send us Stephen Germain . . . "

Whatever it was that the King used on Satan, it was sufficient to cause the latter to make a swift retreat. He turned and fled into outer space, and the King's ship and the Agarthian fleet, plus the three Guardsman ships, followed—towing in their wake the atom bomb vessel from Norway, by means of traction beams.

Satan headed straight for the planetoid, Eros, which at that time stood close to perihelion. The chase lasted eight hours. During that time, all ships had completed their ray gun alterations and were ready to attack. Also, Janice had regained consciousness and become fully informed of the situation. The three special commuters had been dispatched to Earth to find Satan's machine and had been gone six hours, but as yet had not reported any results. Germain, in the meantime, had transferred to the King's ship . . .

The hundred foot commuter vessel that brought him was ridiculously dwarfed by the titanic hull of the great Elder God ship which was almost a mile in diameter. It entered a huge airlock, and the metal doors closed silently behind it. Swiftly, air gushed in around them, and lights went on in the lock. Germain got out of the commuter, saying goodbye to the pilot, and walked over to a large transparent door which an Agarthian technician had just opened for him. When he walked through the giant doorway, the door clicked shut behind him. Germain turned and looked through it at the commuter which was to return to the flagship. He heard the air being sucked out of the ship lock. The lights in the lock went out and the space door slid open, revealing a series of long, black shadows silhouetted against the blazing star-wall of Infinity. It was the fleet, hurtling along steadily with the King's ship, in pursuit of the Enemy of Man.

Hurriedly, Germain was conducted into a vast corridor which he knew at once had been designed for those giants of old who had migrated long since to their new home beyond the stars where he, himself, had once visited them, in the Darkness of Beginning. Two Agarthian spacemen saluted him respectfully and asked him to get into an electrocar that was built to receive people of his own size. In this way they all sped swiftly, almost weightlessly, down a long corridor whose walls were alive with incredible murals.

They came to a stop before a colossal, translucent door. The spacemen

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got out of the electrocar and saluted, and Germain entered the place alone.

He found himself in a gigantic, domed chamber which was fully three hundred feet high. Its forward wall presented a breathtaking panorama of the firmament outside, as seen through gigantic, neatly curving panels of transparent metal, hundreds of feet in length and a hundred feet high. This was a combination navigation bridge and War Ray chamber, as was evidenced by the huge banks of instrument and control boards under the observation panels, and by the master switchboards which he knew controlled the weapons on board.

In the very center of the room was a colossal machine of special design, which was connected to a pillar of peculiar tubes wound with delicate primary and secondary coils of silver wire, which pierced the ceiling, apparently leading to some sort of a projector outside the ship. In front of this great machine, facing the observation panels, were three chairs. Two were of normal size, located on either side of a giant's chair in the middle. One of the small chairs contained the wizened figure of Mandir, with the Sword of Agarthi greaming on the back of his Master's robe. He was bent intently over a control board and watching the Devil's distant ship ahead. On his head was a helmet, attached by wires to the giant machine behind him. The other small chair was vacant, evidently waiting for him to occupy it. But it was the occupant of the giant chair in the middle who drew his undivided attention.

This was the King of the World, as few Agarthians had ever seen him—in his true form and stature.

The King, standing, would have topped sixty feet. Otherwise, he looked the same as his occult image which was familiar to all Agarthians—herculean physique, glorious crown of yellow golden hair, (all but concealed now by his helmet), great, mysterious eyes, benevolent mouth and centaurian nostrils. Here he wore the resplendent trappings and uniform of his true rank in the race and ancient civilization to which he belonged—gleaming harness which scintillated with waves of beneficial energy radiation and the jewel-set badges of his office. For he was not only the King of the World. He was a Star Warden, which meant that he had been assigned to an entire solar system. Now at long last he was waging war against the ancient Usurper, against the false Prince of an outcast Race which had perished save for this single, malevolent being who had proved to be the cleverest and most dangerous of all. With Satan eliminated, the Star Warden, the King of the World, could really begin a new cycle of progress and construction, not only on Earth, but on all the planets of the system. If he should lose now, not only the Earth but also the solar system would be lost.

Germain became aware of all this, mentally, as the King's thoughts took possession of him and drew him forward to occupy the vacant chair beside him. He voluntarily adjusted the helmet on his head and steeled himself to be of whatever assistance he

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:ould. No sooner had he adjusted the ielmet than his mind was swept up nto a world of vibrant energy. He vas still in possession of his senses, ut he was aware of existing, mentaly, in a great cauldron of thought-ower, to which he suddenly realized ie was expected to contribute with is own mind.

This is a macrotelepathy, came the King's thoughts to him. *It combines our psychic energy, Mandir's, and nine, into one pool of thought force nd then amplifies that force a hunlred thousand times. The resultant nergy is converted in a projector utside into a thought ray. I don't beieve Satan can withstand it for long, nce we turn it on full. Nor does he ossess a screen warp capable of relecting the thought ray. He is landng now on Eros. He intends to set up tationary devices there of a power ufficient to overcome us, if given ime. But he must not be given time. Ie is the sole master of a secret vhich even my own race does not yet ossess. It is Universal Power, drawn omehow out of space, itself. That is vhy I have notified our fleet comnander, Tordan, that if the commuter essels dispatched to Earth find Saan's shock wave generator they are ot to destroy it if it can be avoided. or it contains the secret of Universal ower, which is more important than tomic energy.*

Satan lost no time in landing on the lark, airless surface of the planetoid, Eros, and getting ready for battle. The King's ship and the Agarthian leet, accompanied by the three Guardman ships, deployed over his position, two hundred miles out in space, in preparation for the final struggle. The Agarthians and the Guardsmen located the Demon's guard screen and focused their heat and disintegrator rays accordingly. Then, at a signal from the commander, they opened fire. Approximately five hundred heat rays and five hundred disintegrator rays converged on one point above the huge ship, but the attackers soon learned that a guard screen generated by Universal Power was practically impenetrable. Still, thanks to Dr. Grange's refracting apparatus, Satan could achieve no results in reflecting back the rays they aimed at him.

Satan had some rays of his own. They shot out now and began to pick off Agarthian spaceships, breaking neatly through their major and auxiliary screens and blasting them into extinction. The fleet was not equipped to cope with Universal Power.

Then the King's ship fired the pale blue thought beam, or psychic ray, which could not be screened out. It represented the psychic energy of three minds, that of a thousand year old Agarthian Master, of a surgical mutant, and of an Elder God—magnified one hundred thousand times.

The ray flashed for only an instant and then subsided. The King was trying to observe its effects.

All that could be observed at first was a cessation of all activity on Satan's part. He stopped sniping at ships and he stopped reflecting back their own rays. Below, on the surface of Eros, his ancient ship sat motion-

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lessly, darkly, still automatically surrounded by its guard screens.

"Satan is dead!" cried many of the observers. "The King killed him! Long live the King!"

But the King said, "BEWARE! THIS IS AN ANCIENT ENEMY. HIS KNOWLEDGE IS OLDER THAN THE EARTH!"

Slowly, cautiously, the King's ship and the fleet began to close in on the enemy below. The bulk of Eros stood against the stars like a black wall, cutting off half of the firmament from their view. Jagged holes, fissures, and barren rock, like purest obsidian, glistened dimly at them as they scanned the planetoid's surface. This was a fitting location, indeed, for Satan's last stand!

Then suddenly, all observers cried out in dismay. Everyone dashed to the electrovisiscopes to see what had happened. What terrified them most was that they saw—*nothing!* The stars were blotted out. The entire fleet was caught up in a net of impenetrable blackness! And simultaneously they heard the voice of the Dark Prince laughing at them.

"I HAVE SURVIVED THY DEATH BLOW, O KING OF EARTH WORMS!" he shouted in triumph, albeit with a trace of pain in his voice. "THY PSYCHIC RAY IS A CLEVER INVENTION, AND I WILL ADMIT I MIGHT NOT LONG SURVIVE ITS FORCE, BUT NOW HEAR MY WARNING! IF I DIE, EVEN SO SHALL YE ALL DIE WITH ME! YE ARE SURROUNDED BY A SPACE WARP WHICH PULSATES INWARD, CONTRACTING UPON ITSELF. WHEN IT REACHES THY SHIPS, THEY WILL CEASE TO EXIST!"

When he finished speaking, the stars suddenly blazed into view again, and everybody sighed with relief.

"ONE MORE DEMONSTRATION OF THY PSYCHIC RAY AND I SHALL LEAVE THEE THIS SPACE WARP!"

The King realized that the war could decimate all of them, so he did not continue to use the psychic ray. It was a stalemate. But something had to be done soon. The Earth was rocking in waves of destruction. It was vitally necessary for all of them to return home at once and help search for Satan's machine, yet they could not let Satan, himself, escape. But to destroy him was to destroy themselves.

It was precisely at this stage of the developments when they saw approximately sixty long, sleek space ships appear from nowhere. Each ship was close to eight hundred feet long and looked particularly well armed and capable of giving an account of itself in battle. What came into everybody's mind at first sight of them was soon confirmed.

These were the Moon People . . .

On board the Agarthian flagship were three giant Agarthians from Mexico. These were called upon to communicate with the people who belonged to an empire which existed in the cavernous heart of the moon, be

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cause no one else understood their language.

The leader of the moon fleet was equally as big and good-looking as the Mexicans, because actually he was of the same race.

"What are your armaments?" asked the Mexican interpreters, repeating a question of the fleet commander.

"The same as yours," came the reply.

"Straight beams, or *refracted?*"

"We have long since become familiar with the trick of straight beam reflection. Our own rays are adjustable, if that's what you want to know. We can focus them."

"Good! How many heat and disintegrator rays do you carry?"

"Per ship, forty each. That makes forty-eight hundred rays."

"We have five hundred of each. With yours that makes fifty-eight hundred rays, enough to put a hole through Eros, itself. We will give you a target reading. At a signal from us, please converge all your fire, together with our own rays, on the target. We must break through the enemy's special screen."

Before the new attack was begun, the King expressed his opinion that one advantage of the Moon People's presence was that three Agarthian ships might now be spared to go to Earth and help the commuter vessels to locate the shock wave generator. And this was done, because as yet no report had been received from the commuters and it was evident to electrotelescopic observers that Earth was suffering a devastating cataclysm, precisely in accordance with Dr. Borg's predictions. Tidal waves were destroying Earth's leading coastal cities, and the previously pastel shades of the land and ocean masses were taking on an angry, coppery color as an effect of the haze that was due to unprecedented volcanic activity. Millions of innocent terrestrials were perishing in the horrors of diluvium and lava fire, and still the author of their demise held forth on Eros, before eighty-eight space ships and the master vessel of the King of the World.

At a given signal, close to six thousand rays converged on an assigned target, directly on Satan's outer guard screen, and again the blue bolt of the King's psychic ray struck home. Blasts of electric fire were seen to illuminate the visiports of the Demon ship as his outer screen collapsed and he overloaded his Universal Power generators to keep up his auxiliary inner screens.

True to his promise, he used the space warp. The stars were blotted out, and all of them, including the Moon People, were caught in a net of death. As the warp pulsed inward in the process of contraction, outlying ships ceased to exist, dropped into the shades of Nothingness that was the wall of the warp. The combined fleets crowded inward, toward the surface of the planetoid, and the walls of death pursued them, each ship becoming an easier target for Satan's potent, sniping rays.

"KEEP ALL RAYS FULL ON THE ENEMY!" commanded the King, wrathfully. "TO THE

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DEATH!"

So thousands of beams of destructive energy, plus the King's psychic ray, held fast on the target at maximum concentration, while the walls of the space warp shrouded them all in the blackness of inescapable death. And beyond the warp somewhere, a world threatened to burst asunder . . .

This was an impasse that precipitated such a rapid succession of events as to be almost impossible to chronicle in their proper sequence. Faced with the glaring probability of extinction, the King made a decision. *We must find a volunteer pilot for that atom-bomb ship at once. I believe there is a way of getting it through Satan's meteor screen.*

Germain was looking into an electrovisiscope in front of him, his eyes suddenly filled with grave concern and puzzlement. "It looks," he said aloud, "as if someone has anticipated your wish, Sire. Look!"

There in the midst of the fleet, gathering momentum down a space path that was frantically opened for it by the other ships, was the atom-bomb ship. The fact that it was under way proved that someone had gone aboard the vessel. But who?

It will explode without effect if it strikes Satan's meteor screen, thought the King. And he immediately made contact with the Guardsman ships. "YOU MUST BREAK SATAN'S METEOR SCREEN," he ordered, "BEFORE THAT BOMB-SHIP REACHES IT. OUR RAYS CANNOT DISRUPT THE SCREEN, BUT YOUR SHIPS CAN SMASH IT. *DENSIFY!* CONCENTRATE YOUR MASS AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE, AND RAM THE SCREEN IN FRONT OF THE BOMB-SHIP JUST BEFORE IT REACHES THAT POINT. IT IS OUR ONLY CHANCE. IN THE MEANTIME, WE SHALL KEEP THE ENEMY TOO WELL OCCUPIED TO OPERATE HIS OWN WEAPONS."

When David regained consciousness, the first fact he became aware of was that Janice was gone. He called the physicians to his bedside, because he was still weak, and he asked them where she was. They were as surprised as he was to find that she had gotten out of bed. They did not know where she had gone.

He asked how he and the others had been rescued, and when he heard the whole story and was made fully aware of the current situation, he was more worried than before. He asked them to put him in touch with Ingaborg. After a rapid search, it was revealed that she, too, had disappeared.

Finally, word came to him concerning the possible whereabouts of both girls, and the information was so startling in its implications that he would have gotten out of bed to go after them had the physicians not insisted that he would suffer a relapse if he exerted himself. So he called Rocky on the televisor . . .

Rocky's ruddy face was expressionless as he surveyed the countenance of his imagined rival in the televisor screen from on board his own ship. But he listened with growing amazement to what the other had to say.

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"Janice is gone!" was the first thing that David said. "And so is Ingaborg!"

"They probably went to visit friends on some other ship," commented Rocky, dryly, "although I'll admit it's a helluva time and place for visiting. But why tell *me* about it?"

David's blue eyes looked straight into his. "Rockner," he said, "I will admit that I was very much in love with Janice Maine, and that I still am, but thou art wrong in thy opinion of where her own affections lie. She has never wavered in her love for thee, man! Me she only pitied. I envy thee, but at the same time thou makest me want to break thy stubborn neck!"

"You and what army!" retorted Rocky, hotly. Then, on second thought, he said, "Come again? You say Janice never—"

"I say she has never stopped thinking of thee and wanting thee," interrupted David. "But thy block-headed misunderstanding of her has led her to suicide."

"Suicide!" shouted Rocky, wild-eyed, his face suddenly filling the screen. "She didn't—"

"Not yet," replied David "But two space suits are missing from this ship. I think she went first, and Ingaborg followed her in an attempt to stop her. We have observed lights in the visiports of the atom-bomb ship. It is just possible that she is on board it and that she intends to—"

Rocky did not wait to hear any more. He turned the command of his three ships over to his captain and ran for the air-lock that housed his fast commuter.

At the same time David was pushing his physicians aside and getting resolutely to his feet, with a similar plan in mind.

Janice, having analyzed the entire status of the battle, was convinced that the atom-bomb ship was the only answer. She also reasoned that she had less to lose than anybody else by being the volunteer pilot, so she had quickly made her plans and watched for the first opportunity to get away. It came when all physicians and attendants had left the room. Blowing a sentimental kiss in the direction of David's sleeping form, she put on her boots and harness and, again in the famous role of the Cave Witch, with two disintegrator guns dangling at her perfect hips, she made her way secretly to the space gear room. On the way she found it necessary to overcome several guards and lock them in deserted cabins.

In the space gear room she quickly donned a space suit and acquired a rocket propulsion pistol to guide her in the void. She let herself out through an airlock and stood on the ship's hull, looking into the abyss of space. Experimentally, she tried out her rocket pistol. As she was weightless, except for the slight gravitational pull of Eros, she was able to propel herself easily in the direction of the distant atom-bomb ship, thus making herself far less conspicuous than if she had stolen a commuter ship.

She did not know, however, that Ingaborg had been the first to notice

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her absence, and that the blonde Norwegian had played detective, on her own account, and followed her to the space gear room. Ingaborg knew why Janice was determined to sacrifice herself, knew that it was because two people who desperately loved each other had not given each other a chance to explain their grievances. And she was convinced that she, herself, had more reason than the other girl to pilot the suicide ship. For the person who had once started to make her own life worth while was irrevocably dead and gone.

So it was that just as Janice was getting the atom-bomb ship under way, two hands gloved in the plastic material of a space suit were placed on her shoulders, and a familiar voice said, "You little fool. Go tell Rocky you love him, and you'll find your heart trouble will be cured. My heart died with William, so let me have those controls!"

Wild Bill Hikok would have envied the way Janice leveled her guns at Ingaborg. She was out of her space suit and free to move. In the twinkling of an eye, she was standing up facing her friend, the two gun barrels buried in Ingaborg's midriff. "Get off this ship!" she commanded.

But Ingaborg only smiled. "You know your guns are useless, honey," she said, calmly tucking a strand of Janice's coppery hair behind the other's ear. "You can't threaten me with death because you want me to live. It doesn't make sense! Besides, a lot more than just me is at stake here, and not much time is left. We're riding on a load of bombs big enough to jar Eros out of its orbit, and a lot depends on just how that load is used."

"A lot more than both of us is at stake, darling," replied Janice. "I'll not get off this ship, but since you have come on board I'll accept your company—and we'll both be fools, if that's what you think we are!"

A tenderness crept into both girls' eyes as they stood there looking at each other. Janice slipped her guns into their holsters and grasped Ingaborg's hand. "If you must," she said, "it's wonderful to have you! But get out of that plastic sardine can you're wearing and make yourself at home!"

"And you're still an insane fool!" retorted Ingaborg, unzipping her space suit zippers. "Rocky loves you!"

Janice sat down at the controls and waved Ingaborg into a seat beside her. "He proved different by not giving me a chance to explain," she said. "I know what I'm doing. And besides, you and I have business to attend to which is far more important than a couple of human beings and their personal troubles." She adjusted the electrovisiscope to a better focus on the distant target below and placed a firm hand on the propulsion accelerator.

In the meantime, in another part of the same ship, Erich Rothbart sat up dizzily and shook his head. He looked around him at the lead-walled cases that housed the atomic bombs, and then he remembered that Eidelmann had stuck him with a hypo-

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dermic needle. He had turned to kill Eidelmann, but the latter had merely stepped out of his way as he fell to the floor, too weak to fight. While Eidelmann and Von Immerschoen had stood there looking down at him without an expression on their pasty faces, he had slowly lapsed into unconsciousness.

A sudden surge of hatred and a desire for vengeance that welled up inside of him was blotted out by a flood of terror as he realized *why* the two men had left him on this ship. By the peculiar lightness he felt and the faint vibration in the floor plates, he knew that the vessel was in flight—toward Agarthi! They wanted to blast him into nothingness!

He struggled groggily to his feet. He must find those remote controls and destroy them. Then he would *return!* If it had been intended that he should be blown to hell, then Eidelmann and Von Immerschoen and their shiny new space ship would go with him. He did not mind dying, as long as he had company!

However, when he opened the door to the navigation chamber, he saw two space suits crumpled in a corner and Janice and Ingaborg sitting at the controls. He could not explain this except by admitting to himself that more time must have elapsed than he had imagined since last seeing Eidelmann. On the electrovisiscope screen and also in the visiports he saw the black surface of an airless world hurtling in his direction. Terror seized him, and he hurled himself straight at Janice.

In the ensuing scuffle, which lasted only a few seconds, Rothbart knocked Ingaborg unconscious as she tried to come to Janice's assistance. He caught Janice's arms up behind her and threw away her guns. Whatever the reason was behind these two girls' intention to commit suicide, he did not know, nor did he care. What did matter was that he had a space ship, a load of atom bombs, which were deadly weapons that could be used individually, and the two women he had most desired. If he could change the course of the ship in time and escape to a world like Mars or Venus, he might be able to hide out for a while and plan a comeback at Eidelmann and Von Immerschoen, and at the whole world. In the meantime, these girls would make the waiting pleasant. No, he did not want to die! Now he had reasons for living!

As he reached out to fumble with the controls, however, he heard a man's voice behind him.

"Pick on somebody your own size, hop head!"

Rothbart, still holding Janice's arms locked firmly behind her back, turned in wide-eyed amazement to stare at Rocky. The latter stood just inside the doorway of the navigation chamber, wearing his Golden Guardsman's uniform, minus the helmet and air tanks. In his right hand was a disintegrator gun. At his feet were Janice's guns. He kicked them through the door behind him and tossed his own gun after them.

"Let's keep this clean and quiet," he said, expressionlessly. "No shooting!"

"Rocky!" cried Janice. "Oh Rocky,

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get off this ship! In ten minutes it will be atomized!"

Rocky kept coming closer, his big hands clenching and unclenching in anticipation. "Then grab the controls when he lets loose of you!" he said. "Slow her down!"

"No, Rocky! I'll not stop this ship! Its work is more important than us!"

"Then let's get off of it! I got a rose covered shanty back in Agarthi that says living's more fun than being dead!"

Janice's blue-green eyes widened with wonderment, then uncontainable happiness, then fright because of their predicament. Suddenly confronted with the best reason in the world for living, she was vividly aware of the fact that they had to die.

But there was no time for talk, because Rothbart threw her to one side and charged Rocky. He was fully as large as the other, and added to his normal strength was the strength of madness, for he had gone berserk.

Rocky threw a pile-driver blow at his jaw and missed, then went staggering back as Rothbart plowed savagely into him.

Janice's fingers hovered desperately over the controls. Even if there were yet time to swerve from the target, she knew it would be a crime against humanity to do so. But now there was no time. The ship was hurtling unalterably toward the target. It was only a matter of minutes before they would all be dust motes drifting in emptiness.

In the same instant she saw David's frightened face flash on the televisor screen. She saw that he was bent over the controls of a commuter ship, following in their wake.

"Janice!" he shouted. "Stop that ship!"

But Janice only shook her head and said a silent prayer. Too late even for talking. She turned to look at Rocky. It did not matter now whether he won the fight or lost it. Her eyes went dim with tears which were the result of a mixed emotion—pride that he had cared enough to follow her into this death trap, and desolating sorrow that their fate could not have been different, that she would not live to see that rose covered "shanty" in Agarthi.

Rothbart had both of his powerful hands at Rocky's throat. But Rocky grinned back at him. He tripped Rothbart, fell on top of him, knocked half his front teeth out, and sprung both of his arms out sideways. Then he jumped to his feet, jerked Rothbart up with him, and let him have a rocking right to the chin. Rothbart went sailing across the room and hit the wall. Whereupon he slumped and fell into a heap, like a water-soaked scarecrow.

"Janice!" yelled David in the televisor. "In seven minutes you strike the meteor screen!"

But Janice did not hear him. She was looking at Rocky, and he at her. Just as Ingaborg stirred into consciousness, he started walking toward Janice.

Then everything suddenly blacked out. The abruptness of the change was as sharp as a razor's edge. In one instant there was existence, and in the next there was nothing — neither

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thought nor life. Only deep oblivion . . .

For Stephen Germain, and Lillian, for the King and Mandir, for Brion and Stierman and Turner, Grange, Borg and Tordan, and for all the Agarthian spacemen and the Moon People, the events of those last few moments filled them with a suspense that tortured the mind and left an image that could never be erased.

The atom-bomb ship hurled down upon the Demon's meteor screen, toward possible destruction even before it could strike the main target, which was Satan's ship, itself. The invisible screen of energy was some two thousand miles out from the planet, and if it were not pierced in time to make a passage for the bomb-ship it might serve to protect the objective. To eliminate this possibility, two Guardsman ships had shot out together into space and were coming back in a great curve. They were going to come back and ram the shield just before the bomb-ship reached it. As they arced back toward their goal, they flew in twin halos of purplish light, and they grew smaller, densifying themselves to the size of high velocity shells. But they traveled more swiftly by twenty times than the fastest shell, and the stationary mass of each was that of a twenty thousand ton ship. Nor was there any substance, other than a miser's stone, that was harder. There was not a meteor screen that could be generated strong enough to block the irresistible momentum of the Guardsman ships. They could have plowed straight through the King's own ship as easily as a .45 slug through a pound of lard. But it was dangerous for them to come so close to Eros at their speed. They laid their course straight across the top of the meteor screen, but the timing had to be perfect, and if they swayed three degrees off course due to ricocheting action the inertia would kill the crews inside, or swerving in an opposite direction would dash them against the planetoid's surface.

Moreover, facts concerning the passengers of the atom-bomb vessel were soon made known, and this immediately increased the turmoil of suspense in the hearts and minds of those who were close to the individuals who had boarded the death ship. Lillian tried frantically to contact her husband, hoping that he could find some way of stopping the ship, or of influencing Janice and Ingabord and Rocky to jump from it in space suits. She knew that David had gone after them in a fast commuter, but he was too far behind, and no time was left.

"Stephen!" she cried into a televisor to Germain, while Brion and Stierman and others crowded behind her. "Quick! Appeal to the King—do something! Good God! They *can't* die like that!"

In the electrovisiscope screens they all saw two small dots hurtling, it seemed, across the very surface of Eros toward their mathematical rendezvous with the bomb-ship. They knew that these were the Guardsmen, with accelerators wide open, trying to make it on time. And the bomb-ship, visiports aglow with the sign of life on board her, plunged fatally

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downward. In the meantime, the blue shaft of the psychic ray from the King's ship held the Demon in a torturing coma, thus preventing him from shooting the bombship before it arrived.

There were five minutes left before it would arrive at the screen. And if it passed beyond the screen, it would close the gap in just two more minutes.

"CLOSE YOUR VISIPORTS!" came the King's command, suddenly, to everybody in the fleet.

And they all knew that this was because the imminent atomic explosion would blind anyone who looked at it directly. But few there were who could resist the temptation to look until the last fraction of a second. They all saw the two diminutive Guardsman vessels shoot past the bomb-ship's nose just before it reached the screen. And they all saw a violet ring of light ripple outward from where the screen had been struck, which meant that it had momentarily been broken. In that single instant, when the gap was open, the atom-bomb ship plunged through and shot straight for its mark. Only then did the watchers close the visiport shutters and look, instead, into their electrovisiscopes, wondering if they, themselves would survive an explosion that must knock Eros from its orbit. And some there were who prayed for those who were on board the bomb-ship . . .

Rocky came to quickly. He sprang up from the metal floor of the control room and looked around him. Beside him was Ingaborg, just getting to her feet. Both of them looked confusedly at each other, then at David.

"David!" they both cried out.

He turned from his controls and looked at them, his reason staggered by the fact of their presence.

They had been transferred in the merest instant from the bomb-ship to the commuter!

Rocky did not ask why or how. His skin prickled as he realized that a miracle had been performed. He merely turned around to look for Janice.

He found her standing there in the middle of the room, practically in his arms already. As she threw her arms around his neck and he gathered her closely to him, all else in the universe faded from both their minds except themselves and the memory of all they had been through, and how long they had been apart . . .

When her full lips pressed against his, it was as though a vital flow of energy permeated his being. Something exploded in his head. Bright lights blinded him and he floated away somewhere in a dream . . .

When he and Janice picked themselves up off the floor, they saw David and Ingaborg also picking themselves up, as though the whole ship had been turned on end and they had all been knocked off their feet.

"What an explosion!" exclaimed David. "Thank God we were only looking at it in the visiscreen and not directly, or we should have all been blinded! Look!" he cried, pointing at the firmament of stars outside.

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Rocky looked, puzzled by the fact that all the heavens seemed to be filled with the flying debris of a shattered world—*Eros!*

"Explosion?" he said, dumbfounded. "Do you mean to say I—"

Ingaborg smiled at both him and Janice. "The biggest atomic explosion in history occurs right under your noses," she said, "blows up the Devil and half destroys a planetoid, hurling it from its orbit—and *you* two don't even *know* about it!" She shook her head. "*That* is *some* loving!"

Rocky's head ached, but he had a cure for it. He took Janice into his arms again, and she came willingly, her face glowing as though somebody had clicked on a light inside of her. They kissed each other and left the universe to take care of itself . . .

Janice stood in the ancient swimming pool with water up to her neck, her long hair spread out among floating water plants which were covered with lavender blooms. She sighed happily and looked at the spray of branches that crossed the cavern sky above her head. Peacocks sat on the old stone walls of the enclosure, and white doves splashed in puddles at the pool's edge, among young rushes that had sprouted there in her absence. How she had dreamed of returning to this heavenly place, so replete with peacefulness and beauty! If death were denied her forever, she would not regret it, because this was Paradise . . .

Just then she pulled an armful of the floating plants under her chin and wished that the water of the pool was slightly less transparent, because Rocky opened the door of the enclosure and called her name. He was wearing his princely Agarthian robe, and the Sword necklace that Tso Lan Chi had given him dangled from his muscular neck. When he saw her in the pool he quickly stepped inside and closed the door behind him.

"Got you where I want you!" he said, grinning. "I won't let you get out until you say yes to what I asked you."

Janice's brow wrinkled in puzzlement. "What did you ask me?" she said.

"Don't you remember?" He pointed to the dressing bench by the two mirrors, where her clothes lay. "It was a long time ago, over there, but I asked you to be Mrs. Rockner. Now how about it?"

Janice smiled, then acted coy. "Can you cook?" she said.

"Can I cook!" exclaimed Rocky. "Say, you haven't tasted anything till you've tried my—" He paused. "Hey! Where do you get that stuff! Where I come from, the woman does the cooking!"

"Well, *I* can't cook," she replied. "You'd better get yourself a better wife."

"Wait a minute!" he said, kneeling down by the pool. "I think we'd better start this thing fresh from the beginning."

"How do you do that?"

"First I ask you for your telephone number."

"Don't be silly! I haven't got a telephone number!"

Rocky looked worried. "But look,

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honey, you've *got* to have a telephone number!"

Janice looked at him curiously. "Why?" she said.

For answer, Rocky rolled up his sleeves and bared both of his tattooed forearms. "Look!" he said, pointing to several girls' names and telephone numbers. "If they rate, so do you! One of the Guardsman machinists is a swell tattoo artist from Brooklyn. He just finished your name for me. See?" He pointed proudly to a flowery flourish of colorful lettering on his right arm, which spelled *Janice*. "It just isn't complete without a telephone number!" he complained.

Janice's chin darted outward in defiance. "Steve Rockner!" she exclaimed. "I'm going to ask Dr. Borg to skin you alive! If you add another tattoo to that star-spangled carcass of yours, I'll —I'll divorce you!"

"Ah-ah!" Rocky waved his finger at her. "Have to *marry* me first!"

For answer, she splashed a goodly portion of the swimming pool at him . . .

THE END

REVIEWS OF CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS

By FORREST J. ACKERMAN

IF YOU want to write a top-notch science fiction book, start it as a pulp serial. "And write it strictly from hunger!" That was the admission of Bob Heinlein, author of SIXTH COLUMN (Gnome Press, NY, '49; jacket by Cartier; 256 pgs., $2.50) as he autographed a copy for the Director of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society on the set of the scientifilm, DESTINATION MOON.

"If this be from hunger," I kibitzed, "then may your shadow ever grow less! SIXTH COLUMN is a swell story!" And so is the story behind it:

Heinlein wrote SIXTH COLUMN from hunger, all right, but not from hunger of the belly. It was an esthetico-utilitarian hunger: a hunger after beauty and transportation. He sweated out summer day after summer day in a sweltering hot-box of a hotel room in Chicago, back in 1940, typing out the original draft of SIXTH COLUMN, so that he could buy a new *car!* And to give the anecdote its final kicker, the check came in just within a few cents of the purchase price of said automobile.

The first printing of SIXTH COLUMN, in magazine form, paid for the car that Heinlein drove to Denver when he was Guest of Honor at the World Science Fiction Convention of 1941. This was the famous car, incidentally, that his good friend "Skylark" Smith road-tested for him—at 110 miles an hour (or was it only 90?) with the Old Gray Lensman himself steering with one hand and hanging out an open door to listen to the motor purr.

I shudder to think how "Second Stage Lensman" and others as good as SIXTH COLUMN might never have been written!

The story itself? I'd gladly re-read it—and enjoy it—to write this review, but I met a fellow critic the other night, and he opened my eyes when I casually mentioned spending a couple hours perusing a book preparatory to reviewing it. "Pah!" he pahhed, "I just review 'em from the jacket blurbs." Why have I been wasting my time all these years?

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Of course, I don't know as the reviewing-the-jacket-blurbs method is sure to produce critical judgments, as I have a sneaking suspicion that the *publishers* do not *always* tell the strict truth about their products. I suspect that they may *sometimes* over-praise their offerings. However, in this specific case, on the basis of having read the story once originally, having just re-read the first third of it, and having examined what the publishers have to say about it, I find myself in complete agreement with the gnomes of Gnome Press when they state:

"The plot is ingenious. America, its military strength shattered, has been conquered and occupied by invaders from Asia. Only six men remain to salvage victory from defeat. Six men against 400,000,000.

"In the Citadel—an emergency research laboratory hidden in the Rocky Mountains —these six men plan a strange intrigue. They develop an underground organization which eventually explodes into a dramatic rebellion. They have one weapon—a radically new scientific discovery: the Ledbetter Effect, an atomic energy which can be controlled. And they have another weapon—the determination of clever and intelligent Americans.

"SIXTH COLUMN is as exciting as a spy story, as fascinating as secret government documents, as logical as a scientific experiment. Robert A. Heinlein skillfully tells an adventure which is excellent entertainment."

I doubt if, after cudgeling my double brains, I could have worded a review any better, so thank you, Gentlemen, for the generous use of your blurb for quotation purposes. Perhaps I should send you a portion of the editor's check for this article.

What am I saying?

I am saying run, do not walk, to the nearest bookstore or dealer's ad and be good to yourself by buying a copy of SIXTH COLUMN for your favorite shelf.

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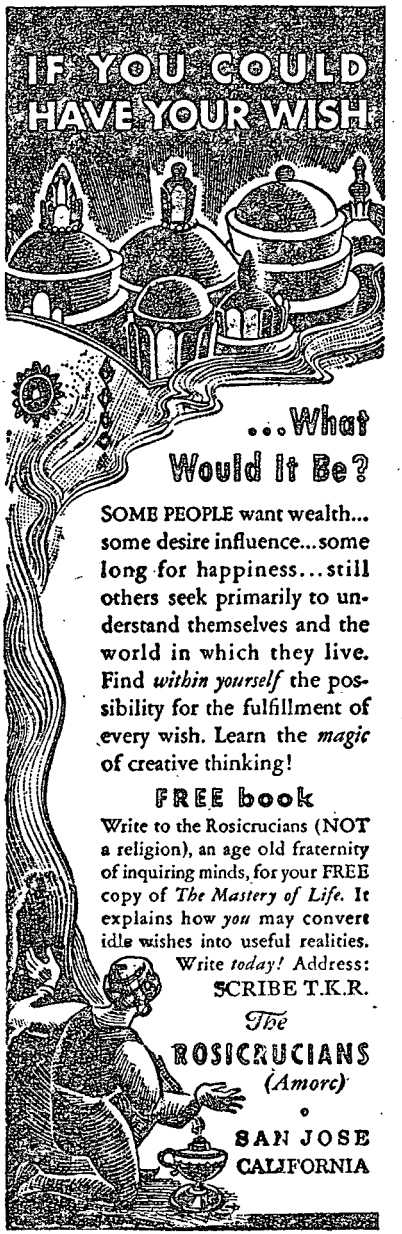
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MR. GARFINKEL AND THE LEPRA-COHEN

By CHARLES R. TANNER

It's embarrassing to be in debt—but to be indebted to the extent of granting your benefactor a pot of gold is even worse . . . especially if you've forgotten how!

MR. SAMUEL GARFINKEL gasped, jerked his foot off the accelerator, jammed on the brake, swung the car sharply to the right and then almost instantly back again. There was a squealing of brakes, a scraping of tires on the road and then the car was back in the right lane (the right lane was the *left* lane, of course, for this was happening in Ireland), and Mr. Garfinkel put his foot cautiously on the gas pedal.

"*Meshugah* Irisher!" he muttered, half aloud. "He should drop right away dead from fright!" He glanced back through the rear view mirror and saw the object of his imprecations emerging again onto the road. The said object was one of those incredibly small, dried up old Irishmen who seems to grow smaller and drier every year of his life. He had appeared suddenly from the row of trees that lined the road, dazed and panic-stricken, directly in the beam of light from Mr. Garfinkel's car. And now, while Mr. Garfinkel's heart was still in his mouth, the little man was again essaying the crossing of the road, still as dazed and panic-stricken as ever.

"If he lives yet the night out, I'll be surprised," said Mr. Garfinkel, and turned his attention to the road ahead, attempting to put the incident out of his mind. But in this case, out of sight was definitely not out of mind. Mr. Garfinkel reached his goal—the home of Mr. Timothy O'Shaughnessy, the manufacturer of world-famous Irish tweeds—

All through the excellent supper

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Illustration by Bill Terry

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the incident annoyed him, and it wasn't until he and Mr. O'Shaughnessy were chatting over their drinks that he suddenly remembered—when he had glanced into his rear-view mirror to see the little Irishman emerging again onto the road, his eye had caught the distant gleam of approaching headlights. Without a doubt, another car had been bearing down on the little stranger. Mr. Garfinkel said, "Oy!" and choked on his whiskey and soda.

"Did I make it a bit too strong, then?" asked Mr. O'Shaughnessy, solicitously.

"It's not the whiskey," answered Mr. Garfinkel in a tone that corresponded to his sudden pallor. "It's just—I just remembered something." He gulped down the remainder of his drink and spent the moment Mr. O'Shaughnessy refilled his glass regaining his poise.

"I had it, a shock, driving over here," he explained as he sipped at the refilled glass. "A little fellow jumped out of the woods onto the road and I almost hit him. And I just remembered that as he started out onto the road again, after I passed, another car was coming."

"Holy Christopher protect him," said Mr. O'Shaughnessy, piously. "But who would be leaping out of the woods like a boogie, after dark? What sort of a fellow was he, now?"

"Little he was," said Mr. Garfinkel. "A dwarf, he should be in a circus, yet. He had it a scrubby white beard, and ten million wrinkles. And I think he had on an apron, like."

"Now that!" exclaimed Mr. O'Shaughnessy, evincing some interest. "That would be none of the neighbors that I know. But belike 'twas one of the little men—a leprachaun, perhaps—By the apron, I'd say 'twas a leprachaun."

"Lepra-Cohen?" asked Mr. Garfinkel, with curiosity in his tone. "This fellow is Jewish, maybe?"

"Not that I ever heard tell," answered his host with a ghost of a smile. "Lepra*chaun* it is, and the little people have lived in old Ireland for many a year. 'Tis the fairies I'm speaking of."

"Oh, the *fairies*!" said Mr. Garfinkel, loftily. "Don't tell me there's grown up people in Ireland what still believes it, there's fairies?"

"Whisht, now," Mr. O'Shaughnessy replied, in a sharp stage-whisper. "Don't you be airing your scepticism around here. This is Ireland, and the wee ones little like to hear of them that doubt them. And faith, there's things that happen here on the sod that could never happen beyond, at all, at all. And how explain it all, save by the little folk?"

"And what then is this lepra-cohen?" asked Mr. Garfinkel. "He's supposed to be one of these little fellows?"

"Supposed to be?" A twinkle of enthusiasm came into Mr. O'Shaughnessy's eyes. "Faith, he is one, and one of the most important, too. The fairy shoemaker, he is, and what with the dances on the green and the dances under the hill, the poor little creature is overworked, entirely, fixing the slippers the fairies wear out.

"But small worry is on him for

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that, for they pay well, the fairy court, and there's never a leprachaun yet that didn't have a pot of gold hidden away somewhere, his savings against a rainy day in Tir-na-shee. Which the same is Fairyland, saving your grace. And they do say—" Mr. O'Shaughnessy paused impressively and refilled his glass—"They do say that if you catch a leprachaun and hold him tight, 'tis the bounden law of the little people that he must give you up his pot of gold."

"A shame I didn't stop my car and go chasing after this fellow," said Mr. Garfinkel with more than a trace of sarcasm in his voice.

"Well, now," said Mr. O'Shaughnessy, judiciously. "You being a foreigner and all that, 'twould perhaps have been of little use for you to attempt to catch him. For, you see, 'tis weird powers the wee people have on them, and if you try to hold a leprachaun, sure, he takes the form of a snake, or a raging lion or a fish or whatever, and before you know it you've dropped him, and whisht!—he's off."

Mr. Garfinkel finished his drink, shook his head negatively at Mr. O'Shaughnessy's offer of another, and lit one of the big fat cigars he liked so well. He offered one to Mr. O'Shaughnessy but that worthy preferred his pipe. A rather strained silence fell over them, ended at last when they returned to the discussion of business.

Now, this Mr. Samuel Garfinkel was the junior partner of the firm of Bromley and Stokes, exclusive English custom-tailors. His senior partner, Mr. Theodore Murphy, usually made an annual trip to Ireland, where he purchased from Mr. O'Shaughnessy a series of fine Irish woolens which, made up into suits by the partners, had gained them fame and fortune.

However, this year, Mr. Murphy's health had been such that he had been unable to make the trip. He had insisted that Mr. Garfinkel go, so, to keep Mr. Murphy in a good mood, Mr. Garfinkel sailed to Ireland, leaving Mr. Murphy digging and planting flowers in his back yard, an exercise his doctor, for some reason, approved of. Everything had gone unexpectedly well and now the deal with Mr. O'Shaughnessy was all complete, and the Irishman had invited Mr. Garfinkel to his home for a farewell supper.

So at last, about midnight, the brief stiffness in their relations was forgotten, Mr. Garfinkel bade his host farewell and started the drive back to Dublin. On the morrow, he would take the train for Cobh, and sail again to the land of his adoption.

As he approached the place where he had so narrowly avoided striking the little Irishman, the uneasiness that had affected him all evening increased ten fold. He slowed down, afraid that he might see, any minute, an uncertain form rush out from the trees. When he finally reached the place where the accident had nearly occurred, he had slowed down to about eight or ten miles-an-hour and moved along, his eyes darting from one side of the road to the other.

Then suddenly he saw it—the hud-

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dled little figure that his presentiment had told him might be there. He stopped the car and leaped out and in a moment he had the head of the little Irishman cradled in his arms. He gazed in amazement at the little figure which he could see by the lights of his car, and a wave of credulousness swept over him.

For the little man really *was* little —not four feet in height—and his face was *so* wrinkled that it seemed impossible that a man might get so wrinkled in one lifetime. And he was dressed in the manner of a bygone day, and as Mr. Garfinkel looked at the knee-length pants, the tricorn hat and the buckled shoon, he knew that Mr. O'Shaughnessy was right.

"A lepracohen!" breathed Mr. Garfinkel. "A leather apron, he's got it! With knickers and a George Washington hat, yet, and here's a shoemaker's hammer in his belt. Oy!"

What was he to do about it? Fate had tossed him what could be a fortune—what was it Mr. O'Shaughnessy had said? It was almost impossible to hold a leprachaun, they changed shape so fast—But this one was unconscious—then what should a fellow do?

Mr. Garfinkel sighed. This little fellow was hurt. Maybe he was a leprachaun—so, and maybe he wasn't—but he was hurt and he needed a doctor. So, quick, he had better get him to town. With a warm sympathy that was characteristic of the gentleman, Mr. Garfinkel gathered the little form up and carried it to the car. With the frugal and business-like carefulness that were characteristic of many of his race, he lay him down on the front seat and kept a tight grip on his wrist as he started the car and drove off with only one hand on the wheel.

It was nearly two o'clock when Mr. Garfinkel drove up to the little hotel where he had been staying on Mr. O'Shaughnessy's recommendation, and the drowsing old clerk scarcely raised his head as Mr. Garfinkel carried the little form past him and up the stairs to the second floor. He had a little trouble getting his keys out, but the unconscious one had not yet begun to get heavy. When he lay him down on his bed, Mr. Garfinkel felt the little fellow all over and was relieved to find no sign of broken bones.

"Might be he's got it, internal injuries," said Mr. Garfinkel to himself, "but he looks at least more peaceful now. Maybe he's not hurt so bad after all."

The little man groaned softly and Mr. Garfinkel leaned forward and began to stroke the small one's head awkwardly. Thus it was that he found the injury that had brought the leprachaun to this pass—was a huge, bloody-clotted bump just above the left ear.

With an ejaculation of concern, Mr. Garfinkel rose and hastened to the water-bowl, where he wet a towel and returned to wash the wound, after which he smeared it with a sulfa salve from his traveler's kit and bound it to the best of his ability.

"He'll need it, a doctor, in the morning," he muttered, "but I guess

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this will do for the night."

He fixed himself a highball, glad to be able to taste something more to his fancy than Mr. O'Shaughnessy's whisky and soda, and returned to study the form of his "fairy." As he did so, the little man opened his eyes and stared blankly at him.

Mr. Garfinkel dropped his glass and before it had time to crash to the floor, he had the little fellow gripped by a wrist and an ankle. He flung himself onto the bed and sat there and panted, while the little man lay and looked at him with a dazed blank wonder growing in his eyes. A moment passed and then another, and still the two sat unmoving; Mr. Garfinkel's eyes sharp and watchful as a hawk's, the other's with dull, uncomprehending amazement.

"So commence!" commanded Mr. Garfinkel, at last. "A lion you should be, or maybe a snake—or might be a gorilla or an alligator—but commence and get it over with."

"The—top of the morning to you, your worship," came slowly from the little man's lips. " 'Tis a bit of an accident I've been after having, I think, and my mind's that dazed, I can hardly tell the words you have on you. What was that about a lion you were saying, now?"

Mr. Garfinkel had a sudden feeling of misgiving. This little fellow didn't even know what he was talking about. So much for Mr. O'Shaughnessy's nonsense about fairies and such. What on earth had made Mr. Garfinkel so credulous, tonight. Was it O'Shaughnessy's drinks or his clever Irish blarney?

And yet— What man of today could be expected to wear such clothes—

"Look once," said Mr. Garfinkel. "Are you a lepracohen or ain't you? Tonight, a friend tells me for the first time about shoemaker fairies, and tonight I find you. You sure look to me like a lepracohen."

"Leprachaun?" whispered the little old man. "Leprachaun, is it. Sure, now, that's plain enough. Yes, a leprachaun I am, and my name's Mallory, but saving them two facts, there's devil a thing I can remember at all, at all."

Mr. Garfinkel's right hand released the fairy's ankle and smote his brow. *"Gevalt!"* he prayed. "Here I've got it a real Irisher fairy—with a pot of gold waiting for me, already—and the good-for-nothing *schnorrer* has to get it *amnesia!"*

For a moment, he stood motionless, stricken with the tragedy, then he moved away from the leprachaun and sank into a chair and buried his face in his hands.

Now, Mr. Garfinkel, as the discerning reader has already no doubt observed, was in somewhat more than a predicament. Mr. Garfinkel was in what he would probably have described as a "pickle." He had in his possession, as it were, a genuine leather-bound Irish leprachaun, with pot of gold presumably attached, and only slightly damaged by temporary amnesia. So far, so good. But—

But he was scheduled to leave Ireland in a little over forty hours. If he held on to the fairy, he'd appar-

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ently have to lug him right across the sea with him. If he didn't—there went a pot of gold, right out the window. If he called a doctor for him, the obvious thing to do, they'd certainly take his leprachaun away from him to put him in a hospital—and goodby, fortune. If he took him to America with him, dodging the doctors and the hopitals and going through the incredible mess of red tape at the immigration offices, and then the little Irishman turned out to be just a little Irishman, and no fairy at all—*oy, veh!*

All night long Mr. Garfinkel pondered and all night long, little Mallory dozed on his bed and let him ponder, and when morning came, Mr. Garfinkel had made his decision. He would take Mallory to America with him and leave the rest to fate.

In the next few days, Mr. Garfinkel was going through a series of events that might have completely ruined his disposition, had there been any distractions. The little man remained quiet and unconcerned and quite amenable to Mr. Garfinkel's every suggestion. His wants, even, were amazingly few, he asked only for bread and milk now and then, and once or twice a little tobacco for his pipe. Mr. Garfinkel, that first night, broke up a couple of his cigars to provide this tobacco, and the little fellow was so pleased with the Havana aroma that Mr. Garfinkel found it necessary, from then on, to buy about twice as many as was his habit.

There is much that could be told about Mr. Garfinkel's difficulties in clearing Mallory for transportation to America, but the narration of these events was inconsequential with what was to follow.

So! Mr. Garfinkel was seated in the ship's lounge, working on the last details of his plan to get Mallory into America. If things went smoothly, he'd be able to get a visitor's visa on Mallory's passport after which the little man would be allowed three month's residence in the country. Of course, there were bound to be a lot of questions asked, and it was the answers to these questions that were occupying Mr. Garfinkel's thoughts. At last, satisfied that he was letter perfect in the story, he arose and made his way to his cabin. He reached the door and before he could open it, he was startled by an incomprehensible yowling that came from within. He swung the door open and shouted for Mallory.

"Sure, it's here I am, your worship," came a muffled voice, hardly discernable in the tumult of caterwauling, "and almost smothered I am, entirely. Would ye be saving me now from these infernal cats before they crush me complete?"

The last part of the sentence Mr. Garfinkel hardly heard, for he had almost gone down in a rush of house cats that poured from his cabin. Such a collection of feline animals it had never been his misfortune to behold before. There were Persian cats, Angora cats, Siamese cats, Maltese cats, black cats, gray cats, red cats and white cats. There were fancy cats, probably pedigreed, alley cats, old maid's cats, tortoise shell cats, tiger cats and hep cats. They had but one

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thing in common, a wild desire to get out of Mr. Garfinkel's cabin. For a moment, Mr. Garfinkel ducked cats and swore in mellifluent Yiddish. Then, the feline hegira being reasonably complete, he waded into the room and towered over the still prostrate Mallory.

"So where you're getting cats?" he demanded of the little man. "Where you're getting cats, I'm asking. These you're not bringing on board in the suit-case, I know."

"Saving your grace, your worship," began the leprachaun. "Saving your grace, they weren't mine. Devil and all do I know about them at all, now. One minute this room was as empty of cats as Finnegan's heart was of grace—and the next minute, I'm spitting cats out of my mouth and tossing them off of myself, and more cats were dropping like rain all around."

Mr. Garfinkel's hands went to his head in a vain attempt to tear the hair which wasn't there.

"Don't tell *me!*" he snapped as he watched the last cat disappear out the cabin door. "A magicker you are—a fairy, already! You think maybe some passenger is bringing maybe a hundred cats aboard, he should play a joke on me and you?"

Mallory groaned and took a pose like Mr. Garfinkel, his head in his hands. The two sat there for a while, while strange sounds—the squeals of women, the curses and ejaculations of men and a vast amount of caterwauling—came from the deck outside of their cabin. The cats were apparently causing as much excitement outside as they had in the cabin. Mr. Garfinkel groaned in anticipation of what was to come and Mallory groaned in sympathy.

"'Twas strange, now that I think on it," said the little man at last.

"So what's strange?" demanded Mr. Garfinkel in bitter sarcasm. "By me is lots of times a hundred cats. I'm keeping them in the pockets of my other suit. It's nothing strange a hundred cats should jump out. I forgot to feed them this morning, that's all."

"Is it so now?" commented the leprachaun, innocently. "But I wasn't talking of that. What I was thinking on was something else entirely. You see, just before the cats broke loose, I was lying here thinking. I was straining my mind to remember something, and suddenlike a bunch of words popped into my head, funny words, all mixed up like. I said them out loud, and as my name's Mallory, that was all them cats needed. 'Twas cats galore and a-plenty from that moment on, your worship."

Mr. Garfinkel got up casually and strolled toward Mallory. He gave a sudden lunge and had the little man by an ankle and a wrist before you could say "Jake Rubenstein."

"You remembered!" he shouted. "Magic words you remembered . . . Magic words what bring cats! Look, your memory you're getting back. Come on, try and remember some more. Might be you could remember something important. Could you remember, say, something maybe about a pot of gold?"

The little man sat down and pressed his hand to his brow in the

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attitude of Rodin's "Thinker." It was a little difficult to do with Mr. Garfinkel holding onto his wrist and ankle, but he managed it. He thought long and diligently, while Mr. Garfinkel cajoled and persuaded. But at last: "It's no use, your worship," he sighed. "Devil a thought pops into my head. I can't even remember the words that brought the cats."

So that was that. Of course, they had trouble about the cats, for there was plenty of evidence that the cats had come from Mr. Garfinkel's cabin. There was also plenty of evidence that they *couldn't* have come from Mr. Garfinkel's cabin, for how can a man smuggle aboard and conceal for several days in a small ship's cabin—one hundred house-cats? So Mr. Garfinkel was cleared of the "crime" but he was looked upon with askance by the passengers for the rest of the trip.

The trip, save for the passengers' unspoken suspicions, proved uneventful. For a day or so, Mr. Garfinkel kept a mighty close watch on the little Mallory, but that strange little man remained for the most of the time in the cabin, sitting in thoughtful pose with one hand wrapped around the bowl of his pipe, which he smoked continually. Only rarely did he speak, a brief "Thank you." after each meal, or a request for a match, or some thing as inconsequential. When he wasn't in the cabin, he was seated in a deck chair just outside of the cabin, with his hand around his pipe and the same puzzled, far-away look in his eyes.

And so they came to New York, and the luck of the Irish seemed to be with Mr. Garfinkel now, for they passed like a breeze through the immigration offices and, armed with a visitor's visa for Mallory, they came at last to Mr. Garfinkel's home.

Up to now, Mr. Garfinkel had been carried along by an unnoticed current of excitement. The adventures in Ireland, getting Mallory out, the plotting and planning to assure his entrance into this country, the adventure of the cats and the doings at the immigration offices had kept his mind busy. Now Mallory was installed as a guest in his apartment, and day followed day and nothing happened. At the tailor shop, he found that Murphy was still too ill to attend business regularly, and it became necessary for Mr. Garfinkel to spend a part of every day at the shop. Mr. Murphy was thankful that Mr. Garfinkel was back and gave up appearing at the shop at all. He spent all of his time at home, presumably continuing his eternal digging and planting in his garden. As day followed day and nothing happened, Mr. Garfinkel's temper began to shorten.

Mr. Garfinkel returned home from the store one day, early as usual, for he didn't like to be away from home and leprachaun any longer than possible. As he stood in the hall outside of his apartment and prepared to put the key in the door, he was startled by a most inhuman grunt that came from within the apartment. Mr. Garfinkel shuddered and froze into immobility. That grunt,

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incredible as it must seem, coming from Mr. Garfinkel's rooms, had been an "oink." *"Oink"* in Mr. Garfinkel's apartment! It was several seconds before Mr. Garfinkel could move, then he unlocked the door and hurled it open.

His worst fears were realized. In the center of the living room lay a huge sow and six contented small pigs. Lying back in Mr. Garfinkel's favorite lounge-chair, Mallory puffed his pipe and regarded the group with a look of beatific happiness on his face.

Mr. Garfinkel's usual bass-baritone "Oy!" failed him completely. It came out as a shrill falsetto, "Iyiyiyiy!" and then he had Mallory by the scruff of the neck and was shaking him.

"For this, I'm bringing you to America," he shouted. "For this, I'm healing your head and feeding you bread and milk, and cheese, already. For this, I'm breaking up my cigars to fill that rotten pipe of yours. *Schnorrer! Goniff! Schlemiehl!"*

He might have struck the little fellow, but Mallory had a look on his face that made Mr. Garfinkel, angry as he was, hesitate. The little man didn't look angry, he didn't even look indignant, his look was one of astonishment. Mr. Garfinkel, instead of hitting him, held him up by his shirt collar and snarled:

"So what you got to say for yourself, hah? Get them—them things out of here, quick, yet. Get them out the same way you got 'em in."

Mallory made a quick, peculiar gesture with his finger and lo! the pigs were gone. Mr. Garfinkel slowly released him and he stood there, his head hanging down, looking for all the world like a whipped dog.

"Your pardon, your worship," he whispered. "I thought I was doing you a favor."

"Favor, schmavor!" snapped Mr. Garfinkel, his words expressing a whole world of disgust. He stood there, saying nothing more, and the little leprachaun cringed lower and lower until Mr. Garfinkel almost expected him to crawl on the floor.

"You see," whined the little man apologetically. "I think my memory has begun to come back. I sat here and I remembered Ireland, and the people there; I thought of the homes and, sure, they had a pig in the parlor, if so be they had the price of one. Then I thought, here's my dear friend, and devil a pig he has, not even a little one. With that, another bunch of funny words popped into my head, and me dying to say them out loud, so I said them—and so help me, your worship, there was the pigs. How I done it at all, I'll never know."

So there it was and what was Mr. Garfinkel to do? The cats had been a trial to him, for he was a man who liked friendly company and the suspicious glances of the ship's passengers had bothered him. But the cats were peaches and cream compared with this latest development of Mallory's latent talents. Mr. Garfinkel sat and thought for a long time, and then he locked the unprotesting leprachaun in the bathroom and took a taxi out to the house of Mr. Murphy, his partner. Mr. Garfinkel had decided that an Irish fairy who was

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liable to get his memory back at any moment was just a little too much to tackle alone. He needed help, and his Irish partner was just the man to help him.

Mr. Murphy, as might have been suspected, was puttering about in his garden, digging a little here and planting a little there. It was Mr. Murphy's only money-losing venture, which Garfinkel frowned upon. He welcomed Mr. Garfinkel and they went inside and sat down.

"A queer thing, I'm going to tell you, Murphy," began Mr. Garfinkel. "If I'm telling this to any ordinary fellow, he'd be thinking for sure that I'm a candidate already for the laughing academy, but you're Irish and so—"

He launched into an account of his capture of and subsequent tribulations with the leprachaun. He recounted Mr. O'Shaughnessy's beliefs and of his own troubles getting Mallory out of Ireland. He told of the cats, and then, after some hesitation, of the pigs. He hesitated after that, for he realized that a humorous smile was playing about Mr. Murphy's lips, then the smile broke into a laugh.

"Sure, I never thought you had such a superstitious nature on you," chuckled Mr. Murphy. "What a devil of a time the little fellow's been having with you and all."

"What you mean?" queried Mr. Garfinkel with a shiver. "You think maybe this fellow ain't no lepracohen at all?"

"Why, Garfinkel, is it no sense you have with you at all?" Mr. Murphy shook his head in amazement at Garfinkel's credulity. "Man, there's no fairies, in Ireland or elsewhere. Snap out of it, Sam. You've been taken in by some slick little beggar, who was content to sit tight and let you believe whatever you wanted, so long as he got three squares a day and tobacco for his pipe. And a clever job he's done of it, too."

Mr. Garfinkel felt sick. "But the pigs," he groaned . . . "and the cats."

"Sure, I don't know how he did it," Mr. Murphy made answer, "but I've seen Blackstone, and Thurston, and Harry Kellar in the old days, and the way they carry on, 'twould be nothing for an Irish beggar to imitate them. He did what you say, I suppose, and that's enough for me. I'll believe what you say—but 'ghosties and ghoulies' and banshees and leprachauns—those are tales for old wives and young childer."

Mr. Garfinkel sat immobile. It was as if a cold breeze was blowing through his mind and sweeping dozens of thoughts out that had crowded it for days. At last, he rose.

"I guess I'll be going, Murphy," he said slowly. "I guess I've been the crazy one for the last month. I'll throw the *schnorrer* out when I get home. Let him get back to Ireland the best way he can."

Mr. Murphy's chuckles ceased. A speculative look came into his eyes.

"That's the right idea, Sam," he said. "And now, I want to bring up another subject. We've been partners for a good many years, and we've always had good luck in all our dealings. Have you ever thought of en-

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larging our partnership a bit—maybe fixing it up so that we'd be partners in all of our financial dealings?"

Mr. Garfinkel was a little surprised. He had spoken several times about this idea, for neither he nor Mr. Murphy had any near relatives and he had thought this a good idea for a long while. He said:

"You know, Murphy, I've wanted it should be this way for several years, now."

"That's fine, then," exclaimed Mr. Murphy. "I'll be calling in my chauffeur and the housekeeper for witnesses, and we'll draw up a paper that'll be nice and legal until the lawyers can fix up something proper."

"A regular enthusiasm you've got it, all of a sudden," said Mr. Garfinkel, with just a trace of suspicion. "What's causing this sudden excitement you should get this done so quick-like?"

"Well, true now, I haven't made my mind up all of a sudden," said Mr. Murphy in his most dignified tone. "But when Teddy Murphy finally decides a thing, he wants it done as soon as possible."

Mr. Garfinkel might have been suspicious, just a bit. He had just finished telling Mr. Murphy of his expectations of a pot of gold, and here was Mr. Murphy, eager to be the partner of Mr. Garfinkel in all things. Yes, he might have been just a tiny bit suspicious, but he quelled his suspicions and let Mr. Murphy call in the witnesses.

"But remember," cautioned Garfinkel, "we are partners *only* in business. My private property, as is yours, does not enter the deal. Your losses in your gardening I do not share."

They drew up and signed the paper and had a drink to its success. Then, Mr. Garfinkel bade Mr. Murphy adieu.

"And throw the little bum out when you get home, Sam," advised Mr. Murphy, as he made his final farewell. "There's never been a fairy in old Ireland in spite of what superstitious people say, but the cleverest beggars in all the world were always Irish."

One can hardly blame Mr. Garfinkel for being down-hearted as he wended his way homeward. He had come to know that his partner's word was good and sound in all his business dealings, and the fact that Mr. Murphy was ten years older than he increased his tendency to take Mr. Murphy's word. So he entered his apartment with a heavy heart and looked around anxiously before he remembered that he had left Mallory locked in the bathroom. He opened his bathroom door and came face to face with a six foot alligator, reared up on its hind legs!

For a moment—no, for a second—Mr. Garfinkel stared, dumbfounded. Then his thoughts clicked into place, he realized what had happened and he leaped at the animal in a flying tackle that would have done credit to whatever famous football tackle your mind happens to recall. Mr. Garfinkel was no coward, and the realization of the reward that might be his spurred him on.

He caught the reptile around the

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waist with one arm, and ducked his head under the gaping jaws to thrust upward thus closing the jowls. He heaved upward, ignoring the lashing tail; the alligator lost its balance and went over backward, and Mr. Garfinkel tumbled on top of the creature, which lay flat on its back and squirmed. Mr. Garfinkel said "Oy!" then he immediately said "Ouch!" and almost jerked his hand from the sharp, prickly quills of the porcupine which had taken the place of the alligator. The thing tried to wiggle away from him, but a swift shift enabled our hero to get a grip on the tail and one forepaw, which he held onto like grim death.

The front paw dissolved in his grip, and if he hadn't had a good grip on the tail, he would have lost his leprachaun entirely, for the third shape had no front legs nor hind ones either. It seemed to be a snake of some kind, and Mr. Garfinkel's free hand barely had time to grab it by the neck. As he did so, he was jolted from hair to toe nails by an electric shock that ran through him, a shock that was so violent it froze every muscle in his body. He cried out in agony, but he didn't—he couldn't—let the electric eel go.

The creature slithered and and squirmed, but Mr. Garfinkel held on. Then the eel was gone and Mr. Garfinkel leaped upon the little mouse that tried to dart from under his recumbent form. He caught the mouse by the neck and one leg and rose again to his feet. No sooner had he done so than it changed again, this time to a baby—*badly* in need of a change.

Mr. Garfinkel was a bachelor and crying babies were a horror to him, as they are to most men who have reached the age of forty without attaining fatherhood. This particular crying baby was a horror which achieved the heights of horror. Mr. Garfinkel turned his head away and held on like grim death.

A tiny voice said "Whisht!" and Mr. Garfinkel looked around in surprise. The baby's face had changed into Mallory's own, and it winked solemnly as it said in Mallory's own voice, "Wait till you see this next one." The baby began to change again, and Mr. Garfinkel realized with a groan that Mallory had remembered the events which transpired earlier in the day. The baby followed the precept laid down by the Duchess' baby in "Alice in Wonderland," and became a pig . . . a greased pig! . . . with lard greased already!

Mr. Garfinkel groaned, opened his befouled hands and the pig was gone . . . and the baby was gone . . . and Mallory, the leprachaun was gone.

Mr. Garfinkel stood in the bathroom and scrubbed at his soiled hands and swore. He swore at Mallory and he swore at himself. He swore at Murphy for raising the doubts in his mind and he swore at O'Shaughnessy for ever starting this business in the first place.

Then a voice said, "So please your worship, I'm back."

Mr. Garfinkel wheeled and almost fell over with surprise as he faced the leprachaun. He stood speechless, as

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much with anger as with amaze. The little man stood sheepishly before him, waiting for him to say something.

"So, you *schlemiehl,* you're back," snorted Mr. Garfinkel at last. "Some more dirt you're getting ready to do to me. Get out, you good-for-nothing!"

"If you please, your worship, I'm on command," whined the little man, woefully. "'Tis the fairy king himself is after sending me."

"Look. With fairies I'm through," Mr. Garfinkel stated. "Get my house out, and stay. Alligators I can stand, and spoiled babies, I can even stand, maybe, but a pig and a *greased* pig—Out of my house, you *schlemiehl!*"

"Sure and if you'll listen, your honor— 'Tis the command of the fairy king that I give you another chance. By the bounden law of fairyland, I have to show gratitude for all you've done for me, and by the word of the king, I have to give you one free hold and promise not to turn into a pig."

Mr. Garfinkel eyed him sourly.

"With a fellow from your imagination, that's no gift," he snapped. "Dinosaurs I'd be wrestling with, already, or octopusses, maybe. Get out!"

"Sure, now, your worship," Mallory's whine grew shrill. "You'll not be getting me in trouble with the fairy king, will you? For, faith, he's a mean man to get riled up, and his anger'll be falling on you, maybe, as well as me. Take your hold now and we'll go on where we left off."

With a snarl, Mr. Garfinkel seized the little man and started to fling him out of the room. Immediately Mallory went into a bewildering series of changes—he was a lion, a snake, an eagle, a fish, a donkey and a dog almost before Mr. Garfinkel could adapt himself to each of the various forms. And then he was Mallory again, with a sheepish look on his face.

"You win," he said. "I'll have to tell you where the treasure is buried."

But Mr. Garfinkel was dubious now. It had been too easy. "I still say, get out, you low-lifer. What kind treasure you think I'd take from a pig? Might be you'd show me Fort Knox, or the vaults of the First National Bank. Get out, I don't trust you."

"Now, your worship, take it easy. 'Tis a real treasure I'm after revealing to you. By the hands of Lugh, 'tis so. A genuine box of gold that I know of, not my own, do you see, but a box that was buried during your famous Civil War. It's been lying there all these years and never a soul knowing of it but the little folk, and it's right here in town."

He was arguing eagerly now, and some of his eagerness rubbed off on Mr. Garfinkel. "Come on," said that worthy, "one last chance I'm giving you. Show me where's this treasure."

With a sprightliness that Mr. Garfinkel had never before seen in him, the little man ran to the door and led Mr. Garfinkel out into the street. Mr. Garfinkel's spirits continued to rise as he was led up one street and down another, through back alleys and across vacant lots until at last they

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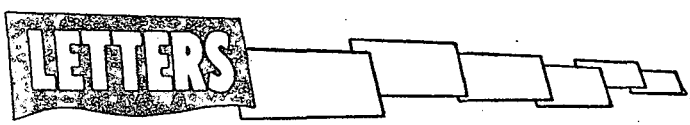
stood before a low brick wall that walled a back yard in from the alley they stood in.

"'Tis over that wall that you'll find the treasure," asserted Mallory, solemnly. "Climb over this wall, right here, and take seven paces from the wall. Dig there and as my name's Mallory of the Hill, you'll find the treasure."

He shook Mr. Garfinkel's hand and vanished.

Mr. Garfinkel looked about him for moment, a perplexed recognition struggling to express itself. The place was familiar, but they had approached it in such an unorthodox manner that he wasn't exactly *sure* where he was. Then, casting his uncertainty aside, Mr. Garfinkel leaped over the wall and stood—in Mr. Murphy's back yard!

THE END



W. N. Austin

Well, the fourth issue did it. After sputtering wickedly in the first three, this, the fourth, gave off with fulminations. Solid, lads and lassies!

First, and recommended for posterity: *Dear Devil!* Always liked idealistic themes, and Mr. Russell did a fine job on it. Give second place to van Vogt for his intriguing but emotionally sterile *War of Nerves*. *Colossus* gets third for its scope, magnitude, titanic proportions. What an author! He writes like deCourcy, Palmer, Shaver, R. E. Howard and C. S. Geier combined. Very good issue.

Wolf Den Book Shop
724 Pike street,
Seattle 1, Wash.

Maybe this sixth issue will explode in your face? We like it rather better than the fourth. And right here is where we ought to give you some news that should delight you: there will be an October issue of OTHER WORLDS. No, it doesn't mean we are coming out monthly, but it does mean we are coming out every six weeks instead of every two months. We haven't heard from you on issue number five, but by now you ought to be fulminating yourself!—Rap.

David Langford

Science fiction has come into its own. As witnesses I give you the March issues of *Coronet* (published by *Esquire*) and *Pageant* (a Hillman publication). Each has a science fiction article which is almost completely pictorial. All the paintings in both magazines were done by Bonestell, and the article in *Pageant* was done by Willy Ley.

When is OTHER WORLDS going to turn monthly?

929 West End Ave.,
New York 25, N. Y.

What you mean is that Coronet *and* Pageant *are coming into their own! They've finally realized that science fiction is in the race too! As for going monthly, we'll do that with about the same pace we used in going to our new schedule of nine issues per year. You just keep on buying OTHER WORLDS every issue (that's all any of you readers have to do to assure a monthly schedule) and you'll get your monthly magazine. And we'll let you in on a secret—the editor wants to go monthly more than you do, and he's going to do it if he has to cut pulpwood trees himself!*—Rap.

Allen Newton

Sorry to see that advertising apparently slipped in March issue. However, as I have

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ent my previous issue away I have no comparison but memory. FATE seems to draw more of the advertiser's dollar.

Am glad to see cut edges, signed illustrations, and as yet, no tendency apparent of following a recent trend in SF which of *Astounding* is most guilty. This trend is one of a Nietzschean super-man ideal and at times I believe the authors suffer from an Oedippus complex. They seem to believe that the world will be brought into a better state of being through the intervention of a super-being who has his own ethics. Other SF magazines have shown the trend and as far as I am concerned, I have lost much of my enthusiasm for buying them. Once I bought *Weird Tales* regularly but after a succession of stories wherein authors sacrificed plot in order to try to obtain atmosphere, I gave up.

Of recent stories in SF that I *remember* as being good I list: Heinlein, *Green Hills Of Earth* in *Satevepost*. Excellent writing, plausible characters and shows an apparent knowledge of "science." *Needle* (author?) *Astounding Stories*, "human" characters and again a knowledge of science. Phillips' *So Shall Ye Reap, Amazing Stories*. Spoiled by hasty writing and at times a little too much editorialism. Pomeroy, *Progress Report, Astounding*. Tops in all recent reading.

I don't know if you agree with my ratings, but this is one reader's opinion. And I have been reading SF since I bought Volume one, Number one of Gernsback's *Amazing* in the mid-twenties.

A few words about your current issue. *Norte Americanos, You Are Doomed!* I disapprove strongly. I fear that our Latin friends will have their feelings hurt! But the lady *knows* her ladinos and her *cows*, and I grinned all over.

The Gamin. A good story.

Live In An Orbit And Love It. I try to sell real estate, so for me it was a natural.

What does one do to get copies of drawings or covers? Feel that the nude in *The Gamin* would make a small start on proposed pornographic art gallery. Have waited until middle age to think about starting "pin-ups"!

English fan Michael Tealby, c/o Burfield Ave., Loughborough, Leics., England receives copies of SF that I send him. I am sending OW to someone else, and haven't the heart to tell him. If you could pass on the word, perhaps somebody else would send him copies, as I am sure he would appreciate it. Best wishes for a successful publishing venture.

114 E. 25th Street,
Baltimore 18, Md.

Actually, we don't try to get any ads, as we prefer stories! We're fans, too, and we consider ads a waste of space. However, we need the money, so we accept any ads (except objectionable ads) that we receive without any effort on our part. It so happened that we had an order for a full-page ad in the issue you refer to, but the plate did not arrive on time, so we left it out.

As for the super-man stuff, maybe we're treading on your toes with our Colossus *I, II and III? I'm afraid we'll have to plead guilty to some of that "trend" you've noticed, but we felt the stories had so much else of value in them (the human element is what floored us) that we could take or leave the other stuff. Mr. Byrne, the author, who is on Guam, is one fine writer, and we took advantage of him this time to get him to do more, and we hope he does. He will turn out, we predict, some of the best stories you have ever read. We know as well as you do that we aren't perfect yet, but we are doing everything we can to wheedle the really good writers out of hiding, where they seem to have gone in disgust. So, we use all the bait we can—even to working our fool heads off revising and cutting a story in their dud-file. Colossus was a dud because it was a "Shaver" story of the caves and the deros. Naturally we couldn't eliminate the caverns altogether, but we've heard from our readers that we succeeded in adding to Mr. Byrne's laurels as a writer. After all, Shaver wasn't first to write of cavern worlds. Remember* Subterranea? *Remember the cave stories in Amazing in 1926-34?*

We agree with you in general on your selection of good stories. And we're pleased to see that you put The Gamin *in the "good" classification. Also that you did grin "all over" at Alma Hill's story. That was its purpose, and we think our Latin friends will see the humor in it too. Everyone knows it's "all in fun," we're sure.*

How do you get illustrations? Well, we'll confess that we give them away. We've promised them to the science fiction conventions for their auctions, which defray the expenses of those affairs. However, if you really want that illustration, we'll dig it out and send it to you. I'm sure the

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convention won't miss that one. But just to make sure we don't get into a "spot" when other readers write in, we'll remove the temptation and ship all back illustrations to Portland right now! How's that for diplomacy?

We trust somebody'll help your English friend out.—Rap.

Charles Hesselberth

Orchids to you for the fine stories in the third issue of OTHER WORLDS. Especially worthy of mention are the interplanetary tales you dished out this time. *Lady* and *Survival* are in a class of their own—superb. *Marai's Wife* and *Lady* are masterpieces that would have interested the weird tale master, our beloved Poe.

Let's keep half of the stories dealing with alien worlds and planets, so our mag can truthfully and proudly fly the name OTHER WORLDS at her masthead. Today as never before people are becoming more curious about other planets, stimulated by our rocket research and also by the fact that we Earthlings may have visitors from outer space in the "flying saucers."

Speaking of flying saucers, isn't it possible to induce Mikel Conrad of Colonial Pictures to make up some 8 and 16mm prints of the actual flying saucers which were filmed in Alaska? I feel sure that many SF fans have projectors and would jump at the chance to obtain a copy. By the way, have you the address of Colonial Pictures?

Whatever you do, don't let Kenneth Arnold become discouraged about bringing out those phono records of the flying saucers. Let's have those living voice records as soon as possible.

There is a big improvement in the illustrations this time. They are very good. It looks like OW will be the best in SF mags.

1318 E. Washington St.,
East Peoria, Illinois

You should certainly be getting enough interplanetary stuff with the July and this September issue! Let us know how you liked these two issues also. As for Colonial Pictures, we haven't the address, but you could find out by addressing Louella Parsons, Hollywood. She broke the story. Kenneth Arnold is not discouraged, and that voice record will be available soon! Also other voice records of immense interest. We think we've got something our readers will like—those who have phonographs.—Rap.

Mrs. Agnes Yancy

This is to thank you for your recent statement in OTHER WORLDS that "we believe science fiction readers are among the top 20% in intelligence, etc." I thoroughly enjoy science fiction, which I read for entertainment, reading being my favorite indoor sport. I read with regret that you were resigning from *Amazing Stories* but since I found OTHER WORLDS I admit it was for a good cause. The March issue was the first one I found, and while I don't attempt to classify the stories, or even rate them as to the one I like best, I do enjoy them all, and all I ask for is more of the same.

Rt. 3
Ft. Payne, Ala.

Glad you found us, Mrs. Yancy. We get a thrill out of all our old friends discovering us all over again. And we're sure it was for a good cause. Your editor is one who thinks personal expression is of top importance, and we can express ourselves to best advantage only in our own magazine—so we took the step. So far, it's been a happy decision.—Rap.

Shelby Vick

What have I been missing? I've heard of OW for some time, but it was only lately, when Vernon McCain sent me the January and March issues, that I had the opportunity to read it. I'd been thinking it was only a mag to rehash the Shaver Mystery and carry occult tripe in line with the type *Amazing* was printing for awhile, but I am overjoyed to see that I was mistaken. Seems to me this is just what we readers want—a mag that we can feel *we* have something to do with; not only watching its growth, but influencing it to a great extent. Good!

Norte Americanos, You Are Doomed! was tops to me. Light, clear, understandable —and of course, funny. *Marai's Wife* was next, but I disagree with you; seems more like *Planet Stories'* type, to me, than *Weird*. *Wee Bonnie Poupon* was also darn good. And this may sound crazy, but Shaver's story, *Lady*, is in fourth place only because of the weather. Maybe you haven't noticed, but certain stories have a better effect in certain weather—the weather, like music, can set the mood. For some intangible reason, *Lady* was a cold-weather story, and this is Florida. . . ; But it shows he can write.

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Now, suggestions. Either get better glue or staple the back. GET FREDRIC BROWN TO DO YOU A STORY! Have fewer covers like March issue, more like January—and don't stick to one artist on the cover. On the interior, if you want fan artists, why don't you get John Grossman? DON'T ever drop *News Of The Month.* DO find a way to make *Personals* more attractive.

Box 493,
Lynn Haven, Fla.

Our printer is installing a new binder which will use staples, and we will switch over just as soon as it is installed. We have just purchased a story from Fredric Brown. We have also purchased covers from H. W. McCauley, Hannes Bok, James B. Settles, Arnold Kohn, Joe W. Tillotson (Robert Fuqua) and J. Allen St. John. And we'll get other artists. How's that for service? Also, you've already seen John Grossman on our art staff! More to come. We'll try to think of a way of dressing up Personals *for you, but we aren't sure of what you mean. New heading, maybe?*—Rap.

Chas. A. Gervasi

I congratulate you on your mag, OW. I see it's improving with every issue. Shaver's *The Fall Of Lemuria* was not so good, but his *Lady* was a masterpiece. Some requests—a page announcing the next issue's stories, and announcing the date on which the next issue will be on sale.

95 Chestnut Street,
Franklin, Mass.

Sometimes we just don't have any stories for the next issue as this one goes to press. We are trying to buy only the very best, and they are hard to stock up. But we'll let you know what we have in store for you as we get it. We suppose you've already noted that we are printing the publication date of the next issue on the contents page now. Also, that we are going to give you OTHER WORLDS oftener. You see, we're gradually giving you everything you ask for.—Rap.

Carl H. Geist

I want to congratulate you on your adult attitude, editorially speaking. I have never been able to fathom the idea involved by a magazine censoring the appearance of a competitor's name in its pages. You'd almost think they were afraid to admit the existence of competitors; they certainly couldn't be stupid enough to believe that their readers ignored all publications other than their own—or could they? You don't know how its pleases me to see you now give the boot to this childish formula. Also, I agree heartily with the observation that was made by a reader in the March issue concerning the letter columns in SS and TWS—and approve your comment thereon.

Your policy of printing diversified stories is right up my alley. I've always been an AS and FA fan, but occasionally get a yen for a story of the *Astounding* type. Now, they put out good stories, but are just a little too much on the other side of the fence—you, I believe, are going to hit the happy medium I've been looking for.

A few general comments and I'll leave you in peace. I'm glad to see Phillips turning out stories like *Elmer Wilde* and *This Time*. . . . Rog would be one of my favorite authors if he'd stick to things like that, which contain no technical gibberish to mar the flow of the good story that he can write. Shaver, also, could rise in my esteem if he'd forget his caves complex. *Lady* was good, and I have no doubt he can turn out more just as good.

2323 W. Ainslie St.,
Chicago 25, Ill.

You know, we're going to try to get the editors of our "rivals" to give us advance notice of their special feature stories, so we can notify our readers in News Of The Month. *We wonder just how far we'll get with this — because maybe they'll think we're trying to steal their stuff. We never did think much of this hush-hush business of keeping things secret until they hit the stands, of avoiding all mention of the existence of others in the field, and so on. We think that if* Planet Stories *gets a story they are particularly proud of, we'd like our readers to get a chance to read it. We might just use this opportunity to invite other editors to drop us a postcard when they plan something special, giving publication date, if possible, so we can time the announcement with their date of issue. We don't ask that they do the same for us, but we'd like to offer our readers every possible service.*—Rap.

Herbert A. Kushner

As I sit here with Volume 1, Number 4 of OTHER WORLDS before me, a number of things are clearly evident:

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1. That OW, while not the best, is evidently one of the leaders in its field.

2. That Raymond A. Palmer of the old *Amazing* school of thought and Raymond A. Palmer of the new OTHER WORLDS are two entirely different persons.

3. That OTHER WORLDS as a SF magazine should steer clear of the mystic, fantastic, occult and weird.

4. That Malcolm Smith is good on covers but slightly erotic on the interior work. A condition which should be remedied as soon as possible.

5. That SCIENCE STORIES is a slightly ridiculous surname for a serious magazine.

6. That all the above opinions are subject to immediate and completely negative change upon the advent of the Shaver Mystery, eternal triangle (bem, fem and hero) covers, scantily clad members of the opposite sex, and halitosis in OTHER WORLDS. To clarify my next to last statement, I should like to say that I enjoy the sight of a shapely female as much as the next red-blooded American youth, but please, not in a science fiction magazine.

Keep up your good work.

1501 West Lexington St.,
Baltimore 23, Md.

No, it's the same Raymond A. Palmer, but with the halter off!

And don't worry, OTHER WORLDS will not stray out of its proper field.

Also, we'll try to confine nudity, or near nudity to the stories which demand it. For instance, this issue, with Automaton. *The whole story would flop on its face if we put the girl in a Navaho blanket; van Vogt used primal instincts in his story, and we followed his lead.*

We don't agree that SCIENCE STORIES is ridiculous. We run stories, and we base them on science. It is a "qualifying" subtitle further to explain OTHER WORLDS. Don't you agree? However, we are proud to note that you call us a "serious magazine. We intend to be serious about it in every way.— Rap.

B. C. Adams

I just wish to say that you have my sincerest thanks for publishing Russell's *Dear Devil* and A. E. van Vogt's *War Of Nerves.* These two stories go onto my list of the twenty best stories I have ever read, so keep them coming.

2207 Quesada Ave.
San Francisco 24, Calif.

We'll make you revise that list so many times you'll just give up and keep adding to the list until there are a lot more than the twenty best stories in your list of favorites. —Rap.

Michael Varady

Are you schizophrenic? I used to hate you when you were at AS and FA, but now I'm beginning to realize you aren't such a bad guy after all. To distinguish between the two of "you" the old guy was Ray A. Balmy, and the new one is Hooray Palmer.

First, I'll register my complaints. You end the letter-section as do too many mags without warning us that it's through. Take a note from Sam Merwin and tell us that our section is completed until next time.

Although you didn't do it so much in the 4th issue, I'm afraid your editorials are just like they were in AS and FA. You plug the stories in the *current* issue, which is stupid. We've already bought the magazine, so we're pretty sure to read the stories. If you're going to plug anything in the editorials, plug the stories in the *next* issue.

I'm not too sure that I like the idea of a sister magazine; of course I would like a new mag in my collection, but I *would* like to see OTHER WORLDS go monthly and read some serials. I hope there'll be a slight difference in the editorial policies, otherwise the other one'll be indistinguishable from OW except by name.

Inasmuch as you're sure to have a war concerning the remarks you made about Shaver, I might as well get my 2¢ worth in. The only way Shaver can *possibly* redeem himself to us (we) indignant fans is to write under a pen-name so that the words Richard S. Shaver won't scare us away. Then, if his stories are voted any good, he can reveal his name and get the respect he deserves, if any.

I hate Henry Hasse.

Thanks for following my suggestion about telling who the artwork is done by; now I can tell you who I like. Malcolm Smith is excellent, but *only* on the cover. His inners are awful. The only two good inners are those done by Mrs. William Wallrich and Thomas Birbiglia, Jr., the latter being the better. These two have *style,* which is what the rest of them lack. None of the inners except those two could be compared with a Bok or a Finlay, because these two have personalities. If you want to see some artwork with *real* style, look

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through the current issue of *Weird Tales*. I'd like to see Ronald Clyne, who does the artwork for Arkham House, on or in your pages.

I'm still in love with your editorial policy. You give the fans a fair say, what they want, they get. You give beginning writers a fair chance alongside the better known ones. You give beginning artists a fair chance. You're terrific.

The best story of the (May) issue was van Vogt's. Then came . . . *And All For One*. I guessed the ending about three paragraphs ahead of the end, but he finished it in a slick fashion. The whole story would have been lousy if he'd had the last sentence: ". . . and he made a good meal," or something like that.

Third was *Dear Devil*. Beautiful!

Colossus comes next. This would have been first place if it hadn't got loused up somewhere in the middle. What's the deal? In the blurb you say it's the second of a trilogy. On page 67 you say *Colossus II* is the second of a trilogy. Make up your mind, Hooray.

3723 Brooklyn Ave.,
Los Angeles 33, Calif.

We'll try to answer that last question first. Actually, the three Colossus *stories, taken together as one story, are (is) a sequel to* Prometheus II *which appeared in* Amazing Stories. *In* Prometheus II, *Byrne used Shaver's characters and killed off the dero. This new story was full of Shaver stuff, and rejected by* Amazing. *We requested the author to send it to us (we didn't know what we were asking for!) and said maybe we could salvage it. We spent three solid weeks "salvaging" it. We are proud to say it now stands on its own feet, as a pure Byrne effort (plus a Palmer blitz-edit). So,* Colossus *was the first of the* Colossus I, II and III *trilogy, but the* Colossus *trilogy in its entirety is really the second of a trilogy of which* Prometheus II *was the first, and there is still another yarn (concerning the Golden Guardsmen) which is the third of the original trilogy. Complicated, isn't it? No wonder we got all twisted up ourselves trying to describe it.*

And now we'll give you another fulfilled request: This, Mr. Varady, is the end of Letters *for this issue. Many thanks for writing us, and we'll be seeing you again!* —Rap.

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